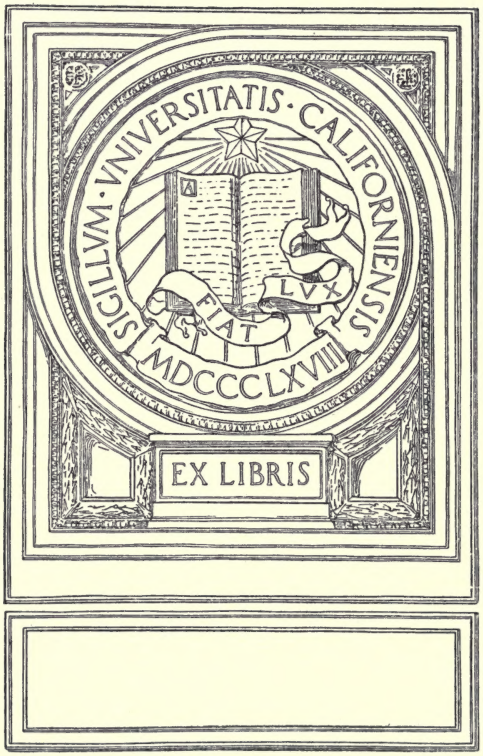
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"No one shall try to cut the Truth out of Her."

The Works of E. P. Roe

VOLUME NINE

"MISS LOU"

AND

DRIVEN BACK TO EDEN

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK
P. F. COLLIER & SON

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In Loving Dedication

To "LITTLE MISS LOU"

MY YOUNGEST DAUGHTER

M119744

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"MISS LOU"

"MISS LOU"

CHAPTER I

A GIRL'S PROTEST

A GREAT, rudely built stone chimney was smoking languidly one afternoon. Leaning against this chimney, as if for protection and support, was a little cabin gray and decrepit with age. The door of the cabin stood wide open, for the warm spring was well advanced in the South. There was no need of a fire, but Aun' Jinkey, the mistress of the abode, said she "kep' hit bunin' fer comp'ny." She sat by it now, smoking as lazily as her chimney, in an old chair which creaked as if in pain when she rocked. She supposed herself to be in deep meditation, and regarded her corncob pipe not merely a solace but also as an invaluable assistant to clearness of thought. Aun' Jinkey had the complacent belief that she could reason out most questions if she could only smoke and think long enough. Unfortunately, events would occur which required action, or which raised new questions before she had had time to solve those originally presented; yet it would be hard to fancy a more tranquil order of things than that of which she was a humble part.

The cabin was shaded by grand old oaks and pines, through which the afternoon sun shone in mild radiance, streaming into the doorway and making a broad track of light over the uneven floor. But Aun' Jinkey kept back in the congenial dusk, oblivious to the loveliness of nature without. At last she removed her pipe from her mouth and revealed her mental processes in words.

"In all my projeckin' dat chile's wuss'n old mars'r en miss, en de wah, en de preachin'. I kin kin' ob see troo dem, en w'at dey dribin' at, but dat chile grow mo' quare en on'countable eb'y day. Long as she wus took up wid her doll en tame rabbits en pony dar wa'n't no circum'cutions 'bout her, en now she am all circum'cution. Not'n gwine 'long plain wid her. She like de run down dar—hit win' en win' ez ef hit had ter go on, en hit couldn't mek up hits min' which way ter go. Sometime hit larfin' in de sun en den hit steal away whar you kyant mos' fin' hit. Dat de way wid Miss Lou. She seem right hyar wid us—she only lil gyurl toder day—en now she 'clinin' to notions ob her own, en she steal away to whar she tink no one see her en tink on heaps ob tings. Won'er ef eber, like de run, she wanter go way off fum us?

"Ole mars'r en ole miss dunno en doan see not'n. Dey kyant. Dey tinks de worl' al'ays gwine des so, dat means de way dey tink hit orter go. Ef hit go any oder way, de worl's wrong, not dey. I ain' sayin' dey is wrong, fer I ain' des tink dat all out'n. 'Long ez she keeps her foots on de chalk line dey mark out dey ain' projeckin' how her min' go yere en dar, zigerty-zag wid notions ob her own."

The door darkened, if the radiant girl standing on the threshold could be said to darken any door. She did not represent the ordinary Southern type, for her hair was gold in the sun and her eyes blue as the violets by the brook. They were full of mirth now as she said: "There you are, Aun' Jinkey, smoking and 'projeckin' ' as usual. You look like an old Voudoo woman, and if I didn't know you as my old mammy—if I should just happen in as a stranger, I'd be afraid of you."

"Voudoo ooman! How you talks, Miss Lou! I'se a member ob de Baptis' Church, en you knows it."

"Oh, I know a heap 'mo'n dat,' as you so often say. If you were only a member of the Baptist Church I wouldn't be running in to see you so often. Uncle says a member of the Baptist Church has been stealing some of his chickens."

"I knows some tings 'bout de members ob *he* church," replied Aun' Jinkey, with a toss of her head.

"I reckon you do, more than they would like to see published in the county paper; but we aren't scandal-mongers, are we, Aun' Jinkey?" and the young visitor sat down in the doorway and looked across the green meadow seen through the opening in the trees. A dogwood stood in the corner of the rail fence, the pink and white of its blossoms well matching the girl's fair face and her rose-dotted calico gown, which, in its severe simplicity, revealed her rounded outlines.

Aun' Jinkey watched her curiously, for it was evident that Miss Lou's thoughts were far away. "W'at you tinkin' 'bout, Miss Lou?" she asked.

"Oh, I hardly know myself. Come, Aun' Jinkey, be a nice old witch and tell me my fortune."

"W'at you want ter know yo' fortin fur?"

"I want to know more than I do now. Look here, Aun' Jinkey, does that run we hear singing yonder go round and round in one place and with the same current? Doesn't it go on? Uncle and aunt want me to go round and round, doing the same things and thinking the same thoughts—not my own thoughts either. Oh, I'm getting *so* tired of it all!"

"Lor' now, chile, I wuz des 'parin' you ter dat run in my min'," said Aun' Jinkey in an awed tone.

"No danger of uncle or aunt comparing me to the run, or anything else. They never had any children and don't know anything about young people. They have a sort of prim, old-fashioned ideal of what the girls in the Baron family should be, and I must become just such a girl—just like that stiff, queer old portrait of grandma when she was a girl. Oh, if they knew how tired of it all I am!"

"Bless yo' heart, Miss Lou, you ain' projeckin' anyting?"

"No, I'm just chafing and beating my wings like a caged bird."

"Now see yere, Miss Lou, isn't you onreason'ble? You

hab a good home; mars'r en miss monstus pius, en dey bringin' you up in de nurter en 'monitions ob de Lawd."

"Too much 'monition, Aun' Jinkey. Uncle and aunt's religion makes me so tired, and they make Sunday so awfully long. Their religion reminds me of the lavender and camphor in which they keep their Sunday clothes. And then the pages of the catechism they have always made me learn, and the long Psalms, too, for punishment! I don't understand religion, anyway. It seems something meant to uphold all their views, and anything contrary to their views isn't right or religious. They don't think much of you Baptists."

"We ain' sufrin' on dat 'count, chile," remarked Aun' Jinkey, dryly.

"There now, Aun' Jinkey, don't you see? Uncle owns you, yet you think for yourself and have a religion of your own. If he knew I was thinking for myself, he'd invoke the memory of all the Barons against me. I don't know very much about the former Barons, except that my father was one. According to what I am told, the girl Barons were the primmest creatures I ever heard of. Then uncle and aunt are so inconsistent, holding up as they do for my admiration Cousin Mad Whately. I don't wonder people shorten his name from Madison to Mad, for if ever there was a wild, reckless fellow, he is. Uncle wants to bring about a match, because Mad's plantation joins ours. Mad acted as if he owned me already when he was home last, and yet he knows I can't abide him. He seems to think I can be subdued like one of his skittish horses."

"You *hab* got a heap on yo' min', Miss Lou, you sho'ly hab. You sut'ny t'ink too much for a young gyurl."

"I'm eighteen, yet uncle and aunt act toward me in some ways as if I were still ten years old. How can I help thinking? The thoughts come. You're a great one to talk against thinking. Uncle says you don't do much else, and that your thoughts are just like the smoke of your pipe."

Aun' Jinkey bridled indignantly at first, but, recollecting herself, said quietly: "I knows my juty ter ole mars'r en'll say not'n gin 'im. He bring you up en gib you a home, Miss Lou. You must reckermember dat ar."

"I'm in a bad mood, I suppose, but I can't help my thoughts, and it's kind of a comfort to speak them out. If he only *would* give me a home and not make it so much like a prison! Uncle's honest, though, to the backbone. On my eighteenth birthday he took me into his office and formally told me about my affairs. I own that part of the plantation on the far side of the run. He has kept all the accounts of that part separate, and if it hadn't been for the war I'd have been rich, and he says I will be rich when the war is over and the South free. He said he had allowed so much for my bringing up and for my education, and that the rest was invested, with his own money, in Confederate bonds. That is all right, and I respect uncle for his downright integrity, but he wants to manage me just as he does my plantation. He wishes to produce just such crops of thoughts as he sows the seeds of, and he would treat my other thoughts like weeds, which must be hoed out, cut down and burned. Then you see he hasn't *given* me a home, and I'm growing to be a woman. If I am old enough to own land, am I never to be old enough to own myself?"

"Dar now, Miss Lou, you raisin' mo' questions dan I kin tink out in a yeah."

"There's dozens more rising in my mind and I can't get rid of them. Aunt keeps my hands knitting and working for the soldiers, and I like to do it. I'd like to be a soldier myself, for then I could go somewhere and do and see something. Life then wouldn't be just doing things with my hands and being told to think exactly what an old gentleman and an old lady think. Of course our side is right in this war, but how can I believe with uncle that nearly all the people in the North are low, wicked and vile? The idea that every Northern soldier is a monster is preposter-

ous to me. Uncle forgets that he has had me taught in United States history. I wish some of them would just march by this out-of-the-way place, for I would like to see for myself what they are like."

"Dar, dar, Miss Lou, you gittin' too bumptious. You like de fus' woman who want ter know too much."

"No," said the girl, her blue eyes becoming dark and earnest, "I want to know what's true, what's right. I can't believe that uncle and aunt's narrow, exclusive, comfortless religion came from heaven; I can't believe that God agrees with uncle as to just what a young girl should do and think and be, but uncle seems to think that the wickedest thing I can do is to disagree with him and aunt. Uncle forgets that there are books in his library, and books make one think. They tell of life very different from mine. Why, Aun' Jinkey, just think what a lonely girl I am! You are about the only one I can talk to. Our neighbors are so far away and we live so secluded that I scarcely have acquaintances of my own age. Aunt thinks young girls should be kept out of society until the proper time, and that time seems no nearer now than ever. If uncle and aunt loved me, it would be different, but they have just got a stiff set of ideas about their duty to me and another set about my duty to them. Why, uncle laughed at a kitten the other day because it was kittenish, but he has always wanted me to behave with the solemnity of an old cat. Oh, dear! I'm *so* tired. I wish something *would* happen."

"Hit brokes me all up ter year you talk so, honey, en I bless de Lawd 'tain' likely anyting gwinter hap'n in dese yere parts. De wah am ragin' way off fum heah, nobody comin' wid news, en bimeby you gits mo' settle down. Some day you know de valley ob peace en quietness."

"See here, Aun' Jinkey," said the girl, with a flash of her eyes, "you know the little pond off in the woods. That's more peaceful than the run, isn't it? Well, it's stagnant, too, and full of snakes. I'd like to know what's going on in the world, but uncle of late does not even let

me read the county paper. I know things are not going to suit him, for he often frowns and throws the paper into the fire. That's what provokes me—the whole world must go just to suit him, or else he is angry."

"Well, now, honey, you hab 'lieve yo' min', en I specs you feel bettah. You mus' des promis yo' ole mammy dat you be keerful en not rile up ole mars'r, kase hit'll ony be harder fer you. I'se ole, en I knows tings do hap'n dough dey of'un come slowlike. You des gwine troo de woods now, en kyant see fur; bimeby you come ter a clearin'. Dat boy ob mine be comin' soon fer his pone en bacon. I'se gwinter do a heap ob tinkin' on all de questions you riz."

"Yes, Aun' Jinkey, I do feel better for speaking out, but I expect I shall do a heap of thinking too. Good-by," and she strolled away toward the brook.

CHAPTER II

SOMETHING HAPPENS

IT was a moody little stream which Miss Lou was following. She did not go far before she sat down on a rock and watched the murmuring waters glide past, conscious meantime of a vague desire to go with them into the unknown. She was not chafing so much at the monotony of her life as at its restrictions, its negation of all pleasing realities, and the persistent pressure upon her attention of a formal round of duties and more formal and antiquated circle of thoughts. Only as she stole away into solitudes like the one in which she now sat dreaming could she escape from the hard materialism of routine, and chiding for idleness usually followed. Her aunt, with an abundance of slaves at her command, could have enjoyed much leisure, yet she was fussily and constantly busy, and the young girl could not help feeling that much which she was expected to do was a mere waste of time.

The serene beauty of the evening, the songs of the mocking and other birds, were not without their effect, however, and she said aloud: "I might be very happy even here if, like the birds, I had the heart to sing—and I would sing if I truly lived and had something to live for."

The sun was approaching the horizon, and she was rising wearily and reluctantly to return when she heard the report of firearms, followed by the sound of swiftly galloping horses. Beyond the brook, on the margin of which she stood, rose a precipitous bank overhung with vines and bushes, and a few rods further back was a plantation road

descending toward a wide belt of forest. A thick copse and growth of young trees ran from the top of the bank toward the road, hiding from her vision that portion of the lane from which the sounds were approaching. Suddenly half a dozen cavalrymen, whom she knew to be Federals from their blue uniforms, galloped into view and passed on in the direction of the forest. One of the group turned his horse sharply behind the concealing copse and spurred directly toward her. She had only time to throw up her hands and utter an involuntary cry of warning about the steep bank, when the horse sprang through the treacherous shrubbery and fell headlong into the stream. The rider saw his peril, withdrew his feet from the stirrups, and in an instinctive effort for self-preservation, threw himself forward, falling upon the sand almost at the young girl's feet. He uttered a groan, shivered, and became insensible. A moment or two later a band in gray galloped by wholly intent upon the Federals, who had disappeared spurring for the woods, and she recognized her cousin, Madison Whately, leading the pursuit. Neither he nor any of his party looked her way, and it was evident that the Union soldier who had so abruptly diverged from the road behind the screening copse had not been discovered. The sounds died away as speedily as they had approached, and all became still again. The startled birds resumed their songs; the injured horse moved feebly, and the girl saw that it was bleeding from a wound, but the man at her feet did not stir. Truly something had happened. What should she do? Breaking the paralysis of her fear and astonishment, she stepped to the brook, gathered up water in her hands, and dashed it into the face of the unconscious man. It had no effect. "Can he be dead?" she asked herself in horror. He was as pale as his bronzed features could become, and her woman's soul was touched that one who looked so strong, who had been so vital a moment before, should now lie there in pathetic and appealing helplessness. Was that fine, manly face the visage of one of the terrible,

bloodthirsty, unscrupulous Yankees? Even as she ran to Aun' Jinkey's cottage for help the thought crossed her mind that the world was not what it had been represented to her, and that she must learn to think and act for herself.

As she approached, Chunk, Aun' Jinkey's grandson, appeared coming from the mansion house. He was nicknamed "Chunk" from his dwarfed stature and his stout, powerful build. Miss Lou put her finger to her lips, glanced hastily around, and led the way into the cabin. She hushed their startled exclamations as she told her story, and then said, "Aun' Jinkey, if he's alive, you must hide him in your loft there where Chunk sleeps. Come with me."

In a few moments all three were beside the unconscious form. Chunk instantly slipped his hand inside the soldier's vest over his heart. "Hit done beats," he said, quickly, and without further hesitation he lifted the man as if he had been a child, bore him safely to the cabin, and laid him on Aun' Jinkey's bed. "Hi, granny, whar dat hot stuff you gib me fer de belly misery?"

Aun' Jinkey had already found a bottle containing a decoction of the wild ginger root, and with pewter spoon forced some of the liquid into the man's mouth. He struggled slightly and began to revive. At last he opened his eyes and looked with an awed expression at the young girl who stood at the foot of the bed.

"I hope you feel better now," she said, kindly.

"Are you—am I alive?" he asked.

"Dar now, mars'r, you isn't in heb'n yet, dough Miss Lou, standin' dar, mout favor de notion. Des you took anoder swaller ob dis ginger-tea, en den you see me'n Chunk ain' angels."

Chunk grinned and chuckled. "Neber was took fer one in my bawn days."

The young man did as he was bidden, then turned his eyes wistfully and questioningly from the two dark visages back to the girl's sympathetic face.

"You remember," she said, "you were being chased, and turned your horse toward a steep bank, which you didn't see, and fell."

"Ah, yes—it's all growing clear. You were the woman I caught glimpse of."

She nodded and said: "I must go now, or some one will come looking for me. I won't speak—tell about this. I'm not on your side, but I'm not going to get a helpless man into more trouble. You may trust Aun' Jinkey and her grandson."

"Dat you kin, mars'r," Chunk ejaculated with peculiar emphasis.

"God bless you, then, for a woman who has a heart. I'm quite content that you're not an angel," and a smile so lighted up the soldier's features that she thought she had never seen a pleasanter looking man.

Worried indeed that she was returning so much later than usual, she hastened homeward. Half-way up the path to the house she met a tall, slender negro girl, who exclaimed, "Hi, Miss Lou, ole miss des gettin' 'stracted 'bout you, en mars'r sez ef you ain' at supper in five minits he's gwine down to Aun' Jinkey en know what she mean, meckin' sech 'sturbence in de fambly."

"How absurd!" thought the girl. "Being a little late is a disturbance in the family." But she hastened on, followed by the girl, who was employed in the capacity of waitress. This girl, Zany by name, resented in accordance with her own ideas and character the principle of repression which dominated the household. She threw a kiss toward the cabin under the trees and shook with silent laughter as she muttered, "Dat fer you, Chunk. You de beat'nst nigger I eber see. You mos' ez bro'd ez I is high, yit you'se reachin' arter me. I des like ter kill mysef lafin' wen we dance tergeder," and she indulged in a jig-step and antics behind Miss Lou's back until she came in sight of the windows, then appeared as if following a hearse.

Miss Lou entered the rear door of the long, two-story

house, surrounded on three sides by a wide piazza. Mr. Baron, a stout, bald-headed old gentleman, was fuming up and down the dining-room while his wife sat in grim silence at the foot of the table. It was evident that they had made stiff, old-fashioned toilets, and both looked askance at the flushed face of the almost breathless girl, still in her simple morning costume. Before she could speak her uncle said, severely, "Since we have waited so long, we will still wait till you can dress."

The girl was glad to escape to her room in order that she might have time to frame some excuse before she faced the inquisition in store for her.

Constitutional traits often assert themselves in a manner contrary to the prevailing characteristics of a region. Instead of the easy-going habits of life common to so many of his neighbors, Mr. Baron was a martinet by nature, and the absence of large, engrossing duties permitted his mind to dwell on little things and to exaggerate them out of all proportion. Indeed, it was this utter lack of perspective in his views and judgments which created for Miss Lou half her trouble. The sin of tardiness which she had just committed was treated like a great moral transgression, or rather it was so frowned upon that it were hard to say he could show his displeasure at a more heinous offence. The one thought now in Mr. Baron's mind was that the sacred routine of the day had been broken. Often there are no greater devotees to routine than those who are virtually idlers. Endowed with the gift of persistence rather than with a resolute will, it had become second nature to maintain the daily order of action and thought which he believed to be his right to enforce upon his household. Every one chafed under his inexorable system except his wife. She had married when young, had grown up into it, and supplemented it with a system of her own which took the form of a scrupulous and periodical attention to all little details of housekeeping. There was a constant friction, therefore, between the careless, indolent natures of the slaves and the

precise, exacting requirements of both master and mistress. Miss Lou, as she was generally called on the plantation, had grown up into this routine as a flower blooms in a stiff old garden, and no amount of repression, admonition and exhortation, not even in her younger days of punishment, could quench her spirit or benumb her mind. She submitted, she yielded, with varying degrees of grace or reluctance. As she increased in years, her thoughts, as we have seen, were verging more and more on the border of rebellion. But the habit of obedience and submission still had its influence. Moreover, there had been no strong motive and little opportunity for independent action. Hoping not even for tolerance, much less for sympathy, she kept her thoughts to herself, except as she occasionally relieved her mind to her old mammy, Aun' Jinkey.

She came into the dining-room hastily at last, but the expression of her face was impassive and inscrutable. She was received in solemn silence, broken at first only by the long formal grace which Mr. Baron never omitted and never varied. In her rebellious mood the girl thought, "What a queer God it would be if he were pleased with this old cut-and-dried form of words! All the time uncle's saying them he is thinking how he'll show me his displeasure."

Mr. Baron evidently concluded that his best method at first would be an expression of offended dignity, and the meal began in depressing silence, which Mrs. Baron was naturally the first to break. "It must be evident to you, Louise," she said in a thin, monotonous voice, "that the time has come for you to consider and revise your conduct. The fact that your uncle has been kept waiting for his supper is only one result of an unhappy change which I have observed, but have forborne to speak of in the hope that your own conscience and the influence of your past training would lead you to consider and conform. Think of the precious moments, indeed I may say hours, that you have wasted this afternoon in idle converse with an old negress who is no fit companion for you! You are becoming too old—"

"Too old, aunt? Do you at last recognize the fact that I am growing older?"

With a faint expression of surprise dawning in her impassive face Mrs. Baron continued: "Yes, old enough to remember yourself and not to be compelled to recognize the duties of approaching womanhood. I truly begin to feel that I must forbid these visits to an old, ignorant and foolish creature whose ideas are totally at variance with all that is proper and right."

"Uncle thinks I have approached womanhood sufficiently near to know something of my business affairs, and even went so far as to suggest his project of marrying me to my cousin in order to unite in sacred—I mean legal bonds the two plantations."

The two old people looked at each other, then stared at their niece, who, with hot face, maintained the pretence of eating her supper. "Truly, Louise," began Mr. Baron, solemnly, "you are indulging in strange and unbecoming language. I have revealed to you your pecuniary affairs, and I have more than once suggested an alliance which is in accordance with our wishes and your interests, in order to prove to you how scrupulous we are in promoting your welfare. We look for grateful recognition and a wise, persistent effort on your part to further our efforts in your behalf."

"It doesn't seem to me wise to talk to a mere child about property and marriage," said the girl, breathing quickly in the consciousness of her temerity and her rising spirit of rebellion.

"You are ceasing to be a mere child," resumed her uncle, severely.

"That cannot be," Miss Lou interrupted. "You and aunt speak to me as you did years ago when I was a child. Can you expect me to have a woman's form and not a woman's mind? Are women told exactly what they must think and do, like little children? Aunt threatens to forbid visits to my old mammy. If I were but five years old she couldn't

do more. You speak of marrying me to my cousin as if I had merely the form and appearance of a woman, and no mind or wishes of my own. I have never said I wanted to marry him or any one."

"Why, Louise, you are verging toward flat rebellion," gasped her uncle, laying down his knife and fork.

"Oh, no, uncle! I'm merely growing up. You should have kept the library locked; you should never have had me taught to read, if you expected me to become the mere shell of a woman, having no ideas of my own."

"We wish you to have ideas, and have tried to inculcate right ideas."

"Which means only your ideas, uncle."

"Louise, are you losing your mind?"

"No, uncle, I am beginning to find it, and that I have a right to use it. I am willing to pay all due respect and deference to you and to aunt, but I protest against being treated as a child on one hand and as a wax figure which can be stood up and married to anybody on the other. I have patiently borne this treatment as long as I can, and I now reckon the time has come to end it."

Mr. Baron was thunderstruck and his wife was feeling for her smelling-bottle. Catching a glimpse of Zany, where she stood open-mouthed in her astonishment, her master said, sternly, "Leave the room!" Then he added to his niece, "Think of your uttering such wild talk before one of our people! Don't you know that my will must be law on this plantation?"

"I'm not one of your people," responded the girl, haughtily. "I'm your niece, and a Southern girl who will call no man master."

At this moment there was a knock at the door. Without waiting for it to be opened, a tall, lank man entered and said, hastily, "Mr. Baron, I reckon there's news which yer orter hear toreckly." He was the overseer of the plantation.

CHAPTER III

MAD WHATELY

MR. BARON was one of the few of the landed gentry in the region who was not known by a military title, and he rather prided himself on the fact. "I'm a man of peace," he was accustomed to say, and his neighbors often remarked, "Yes, Baron is peaceable if he has his own way in everything, but there's no young blood in the county more ready for a fray than he for a lawsuit." "Law and order" was Mr. Baron's motto, but by these terms he meant the perpetuity of the conditions under which he and his ancestors had thus far lived. To distrust these conditions was the crime of crimes. In his estimation, therefore, a Northern soldier was a monster surpassed only by the out-and-out abolitionist. While it had so happened that, even as a young man, his tastes had been legal rather than military, he regarded the war of secession as more sacred than any conflict of the past, and was willing to make great sacrifices for its maintenance. He had invested all his funds as well as those of his niece in Confederate bonds, and he had annually contributed a large portion of the product of his lands to the support of the army. Living remote from the scenes of actual strife, he had been able to maintain his illusions and hopes to a far greater extent than many others of like mind with himself; but as the war drew toward its close, even the few newspapers he read were compelled to justify their name in some degree by giving very unpalatable information. As none are so blind as those who will not see, the old man had tes-

tily pooh-poohed at what he termed "temporary reverses," and his immunity from disturbance had confirmed his belief that the old order of things could not materially change. True, some of his slaves had disappeared, but he had given one who had been caught such a lesson that the rest had remained quiet if not contented.

The news brought by his overseer became therefore more disturbing than the strange and preposterous conduct of his niece, and he had demanded excitedly, "What on earth's the matter, Perkins?"

"Well, sir, fur's I kin mek out, this very plantation's been p'luted by Yankee soldiers this very evenin'. Yes, sir."

"Great heavens! Perkins," and Mr. Baron sprang from his chair, then sank back again with an expression suggesting that if the earth opened next it could not be worse.

"Yes, sir," resumed Perkins, solemnly, "I drawed that much from Jute. He seen 'em hisself. I noticed a s'pressed 'citement en talk in the quarters this evenin', an' I follered hit right up an' I ast roun' till I pinned Jute. He was over the fur side of the run lookin' fur a stray crow, an' he seen 'em. But they was bein' chased lively. Mad Whately—beg pardon—Mr. Madison was arter them with whip and spur. Didn't yer hear a crack of a rifle? I did, and reckoned it was one o' the Simcoe boys out gunnin', but Jute says hit was one o' our men fired the shot, en that they chased the Yanks to'erds the big woods. They was all mounted en goin' it lickity switch. The thing that sticks in my crop isn't them few what Mr. Madison chased, but the main body they belongs to. Looks as ef there's goin' to be a raid down our way."

"If that is so," said Mr. Baron, majestically, "Lieutenant Whately proves that our brave men are not far off, either, and the way he chased some of them shows how all the vile invaders will eventually be driven out of the country. Be vigilant, Perkins, and let it be understood at the quarters that Lieutenant Whately is within call."

The overseer bowed awkwardly and limped away. His lameness had secured him immunity from military duty.

"Ah, that's a man for you," said Mr. Baron, glaring at his niece. "Your cousin is a true scion of Southern chivalry. That is the kind of a man you do not know whether you wish to marry or not—a brave defender of our hearths and liberties."

"If he wishes to marry me against my will, he's not a defender of my liberty," retorted the girl.

"If you had the spirit which should be your birthright your eyes would flash with joy at the prospect of seeing a hero who could thus chase your enemies from our soil. If you could only have seen him in his headlong—"

"I did see him."

"What!"

"I saw Cousin Madison leading a dozen or more men in pursuit of half a dozen. That does not strike me as sublimely heroic."

"Why haven't you told me of this? How could you have seen him?" and the old man, in his strong excitement, rose from his chair.

"My reception when I entered was not conducive to conversation. I was merely sitting by the run and saw both parties gallop past."

"You should have come instantly to me."

"I'm sure I came in hastily," she replied, crimsoning in the consciousness of her secret, "but I was met as if I had been guilty of something awful."

"Well, if I had known," began her uncle, in some confusion, mistaking her color for an expression of anger.

"I think," remarked her aunt, coldly, "that Louise should have recognized that she had given you just cause for displeasure by her tardiness, unless it were explained, and she should have explained at once. I have no patience with the spirit she is displaying."

But Mr. Baron's mind had been diverted to more serious

and alarming considerations than what he characterized mentally as "a girl's tantrum."

"It makes my blood boil," he said, to think that this Northern scum is actually in our neighborhood, and might be at our doors but for my brave nephew. Thanks to him, they met a righteous reception on this plantation; thanks to him, in all probability, we are not now weltering in our blood, with the roof that shelters us blazing over our heads. If those marauders had found us unprotected, young woman, you would have rued the day. Their capacity for evil is only equalled by their opportunities. If your cousin had not flamed after them like an avenging sword you might have cried loudly enough for the one of whom, in your fit of unseemly petulance, you can speak so slightingly. I advise you to go to your room and thank Heaven for your escape."

"Uncle, are the people of the North savages?"

"Its soldiers are worse than savages. Have you not heard me express my opinion of them over and over again? Go to your room, and when you appear again, I trust it will be with the meekness and submission becoming in a young woman."

When the girl left Aun' Jinkey's cabin the young soldier looked after her with an expression of deep interest. "Who is she?" he asked.

"Dat's Miss Lou," said the old negress, forcing into his mouth another spoonful of her fiery decoction.

"Oh, that's enough, aunty, unless you wish to burn me out like a hollow log," and he struggled to his feet to ease his tendency to strangle. "Miss Lou? How should I know who she is?"

"Ob co'se," said Aun' Jinkey, dryly, "I ain' namin' her pedigree."

"You a Linkum man, ain' you?" Chunk asked, quickly.

"Yes, and Lincoln is a good friend of yours."

"Hi! I knows dat. W'at fer you so hidin'-in-de-grass, granny? No use bein' dat away wid a Linkum man."

"I ain' talkin' 'bout my young mistis to folks ez drap down fum de clouds."

"You wouldn't like me better if I came up from below, aunty. There now, I'm not a very bad fellow, and I belong to the army that's going to make you all free."

"I hasn't des tink out dis question ob bein' free yit. I'se too ole to wuk much an' old mars'r's took keer on me long time."

"Well, I'se tink it out," put in Chunk, decidedly; "en I'se able to wuk fer you en me too."

"You mighty peart, Chunk, co'tin' a gal lie a bean-pole a'ready. I reck'n she spen' all you eber mek. You bettah boos' de Linkum man into dat ar lof' sud'n, kase ef Marse Perkins cotch 'im yere we all ain' feelin' berry good bimeby."

"Dat ar truer'n preachin'," admitted Chunk, with alacrity. "Des you tek hol' ob dem ladder rouns, mars'r, an' put yo' foots on my sho'lers. Dat's hit. Nobody tink ob fin'in' you yere. I'se study how ter git yo' hoss out of sight 'gin mawnin'."

"You stand by me, Chunk," said the soldier, "and you won't be sorry. There's a lot of us coming this way soon, and I can be a good friend of yours and all your people if you help me out of this scrape."

"I'se gwine ter stan' by you, boss. I'se mek up my min' ter be free dis time, sho! Hi! w'at dat?"

He was wonderfully agile, for his arms were nearly as long as his legs. In an instant he descended, drawing a trap-door after him. Then he sauntered to the door, which he opened wide. A troop of horsemen were coming single file by a path which led near the cabin, and the foremost asked in a voice which the negro recognized as that of Lieutenant Whately, "Is that you, Chunk?"

"Dat's me, mars'r. My 'specs."

"Be off, you skeleton. Make time for the house and help get supper for me and the men. If you don't run like a red deer, I'll ride you down."

"Good Lawd! w'at gwine ter hap'n nex'?" groaned

Chunk, as he disappeared toward the mansion. He burst like a bombshell into the kitchen, a small building in the rear of the house.

"Did you eber see de likes?" exclaimed Zany. "What yo' manners—"

"Hi, dar! talk 'bout manners! Marse Whately comin' wid a army, en want supper fer um all in des one minute en er haf by de clock!"

Great, fat Aun' Suke threw up her hands in despair, and in the brief silence the tramp of horses and the jingling of sabres were plainly heard. They all knew Mad Whately, and it needed not that Mrs. Baron, desperately flurried, should bustle in a few moments later with orders that all hands should fly around. "What you doing here?" she asked Chunk, sharply.

"I'se here ter hep, mistis. Dem's my orders from Marse Whately. He come ridin' by granny's."

"Then go and kill chickens."

A few moments later the dolorous outcry of fowls was added to the uproar made by the barking dogs.

With a chill of fear Miss Lou, in her chamber, recognized her cousin's voice, and knew that he, with his band, had come to claim hospitality at his uncle's hands. What complications did his presence portend? Truly, the long months of monotony on the old plantation were broken now. What the end would be she dared not think, but for the moment her spirit exulted in the excitement which would at least banish stagnation.

In his secret heart Mr. Baron had hoped that his nephew would go on to his own home, a few miles further; for applauding him as a hero was one thing, and having him turn everything upside down at that hour another. Routine and order were scattered to the winds whenever Mad Whately made his appearance, but the host's second thoughts led him to remember that this visitation was infinitely to be preferred to one from the terrible Yankees; so he threw wide open the door, and, with his wife, greeted his nephew

warmly. Then he shouted for Perkins to come and look after the horses.

"Ah, mine uncle," cried Whately, "where on earth is to be found a festive board like yours? Who so ready to fill the flowing bowl until even the rim is lost to sight, when your defenders have a few hours to spare in their hard campaigning? You won't entertain angels unawares to-night. You'd have been like Daniel in the den with none to stop the lions' mouths, or rather the jackals', had we not appeared on the scene. The Yanks were bearing down for you like the wolf on the fold. Where's my pretty cousin?"

Mr. Baron had opened his mouth to speak several times during this characteristic greeting, and now he hastened to the foot of the stairs and shouted, "Louise, come down and help your aunt entertain our guests." Meanwhile Whately stepped to the sideboard and helped himself liberally to the sherry.

"You know me must maintain discipline," resumed Whately, as his uncle entered the dining-room. "The night is mild and still. Let a long table be set on the piazza for my men. I can then pledge them through the open window, for since I give them such hard service, I must make amends when I can. Ah, Perkins, have your people rub the horses till they are ready to prance, then feed them lightly, two hours later a heavier feed, that's a good fellow! You were born under a lucky star, uncle. You might now be tied up by your thumbs, while the Yanks helped themselves."

"It surely was a kind Providence which brought you here, nephew."

"No doubt, no doubt; my good horse, also, and, I may add, the wish to see my pretty cousin. Ah! here she comes with the blushes of the morning on her cheeks," but his warmer than a cousinly embrace and kiss left the crimson of anger in their places.

She drew herself up indignantly to her full height and

said, "We have been discussing the fact that I am quite grown up. I will thank *you* to note the change, also."

"Why, so I do," he replied, regarding her with undisguised admiration; "and old Father Time has touched you only to improve you in every respect."

"Very well, then," she replied, coldly, "I cannot help the touch of Father Time, but I wish it understood that I am no longer a child."

"Neither am I, sweet cousin, and I like you as a woman far better."

She left the room abruptly to assist her aunt.

"Jove! uncle, but she has grown to be a beauty. How these girls blossom out when their time comes! Can it be that I have been absent a year?"

"Yes, and your last visit was but a flying one."

"And so I fear this one must be. The Yanks are on the move, perhaps in this direction, and so are we. It was one of their scouting parties that we ran into. Their horses were fresher than ours and they separated when once in the shadow of the woods. They won't be slow, however, in leaving these parts, now they know we are here. I'm going to take a little well-earned rest between my scoutings, and make love to my cousin. Olympian humbugs! how handsome and haughty she has become! I didn't think the little minx had so much spirit."

"She has suddenly taken the notion that, since she is growing up, she can snap her fingers at all the powers that be."

"Growing up! Why, uncle, she's grown, and ready to hear me say, 'With all my worldly goods I thee endow.' "

"But the trouble is, she doesn't act as if very ready."

"Oh, tush! she isn't ready to throw herself at the head of any one. That isn't the way of Southern girls. They want a wooer like a cyclone, who carries them by storm, marries them *nolens volens*, and then they're happy. But to be serious, uncle, in these stormy times Lou needs a protector. You've escaped for a long time, but no one

can tell now what a day will bring forth. As my wife, Cousin Lou will command more respect. I can take her within our lines, if necessary, or send her to a place of safety. Ah, here comes my blooming aunt to prepare for supper."

"Welcome to The Oaks," she again repeated. "Never more welcome, since you come as defender as well as guest."

"Yes, aunt; think of a red-whiskered Yank paying his respects instead of me."

"Don't suggest such horrors, please."

The gentlemen now joined Miss Lou in the parlor, while under Mrs. Baron's supervision Zany, and Chunk, as gardener and man-of-all-work, with the aid of others soon set the two tables. Then began a procession of negroes of all sizes bearing viands from the kitchen.

CHAPTER IV

AUN' JINKEY'S POLICY

ALLAN SCOVILLE, for such was the Union soldier's name, fully realized that he was in the enemy's country as he watched through a cranny in the cabin the shadowy forms of the Confederates file past. Every bone in his body ached as if it had been broken, and more than once he moved his arms and legs to assure himself that they were whole. "Breath was just knocked right out of me," he muttered. "I hope that's the worst, for this place may soon become too hot for me. My good horse is not only lost, but I may be lost also through him. That queer-looking darky, Chunk, is my best hope now unless it is Miss Lou. Droll, wasn't it, that I should take her for an angel? What queer thoughts a fellow has when within half an inch of the seamy side of life! Hanged if I deserve such an awakening as I thought was blessing my eyes on the other side. From the way I ache, the other side mayn't be far off yet. Like enough hours will pass before Chunk comes back, and I must try to propitiate his grandam."

He crawled painfully to the trap-door and, finding a chink in the boards, looked down into the apartment below. Aun' Jinkey was smoking as composedly it might seem as if a terrible Yankee, never seen before, was not over her head, and a band of Confederates who would have made him a prisoner and punished her were only a few rods away. A close observer, however, might have noticed

that she was not enjoying languid whiffs, as had been the case in the afternoon. The old woman had put guile into her pipe as well as tobacco, and she hoped its smoke would blind suspicious eyes if any were hunting for a stray Yankee. Chunk's pone and bacon had been put near the fire to keep warm, and Scoville looked at the viands longingly.

At last he ventured to whisper, "Aun' Jinkey, I am as hungry as a wolf."

"Hesh!" said the old woman softly. Then she rose, knocked the ashes from her pipe with great deliberation, and taking a bucket started for the spring. In going and coming she looked very sharply in all directions, thus satisfying herself that no one was watching the cabin. Re-entering, she whispered, "Kin you lif de trap-do' ?"

Scoville opened it, and was about to descend. "No, you kyant do dat," interposed Aun' Jinkey, quickly. "Lie down up dar, en I han' you Chunk's supper. He gits his'n at de big house. You's got ter play possum right smart, mars'r, or you git cotched. Den we cotch it, too. You 'speck I doan know de resk Chunk en me tookin?"

"Forgive me, Aunt Jinkey. But your troubles will soon be over and you be as free as I am."

"I doesn't want no sech freedom ez you got, mars'r, hid'n en scrugin' fum tarin' en rarin' red-hot gallopers ez Mad Whately en his men. Dey'd des bun de ole cabin en me in't ef dey knowed you's dar. Bettah stop yo' mouf wid yo' supper."

This Scoville was well contented to do for a time, while Aun' Jinkey smoked and listened with all her ears. Faint sounds came from the house and the negro quarters, but all was still about the cabin. Suddenly she took her pipe from her mouth and muttered, "Dar goes a squinch-owl tootin'. Dat doan mean no good."

"Aunt Jinkey," said Scoville, who was watching her, "that screech-owl worries you, doesn't it?"

"Dere's mo' kin's ob squinch-owls dan you 'lows on,

mars'r. Some toots fer de sake ob tootin' en some toots in warnin'."

"That one tooted in warning. Don't be surprised if you hear another very near." He crawled to the cranny under the eaves and Aun' Jinkey fairly jumped out of her chair as she heard an owl apparently hooting on the roof with a vigor and truth to nature that utterly deceived her senses. Scoville repeated the signal, and then crept back to the chink in the floor. The old woman was trembling and looking round in dismayed uncertainty. "There," he said, with a low laugh, "that squinch-owl was I, and the first you heard was one of my men. Now, like a good soul, make pones and fry bacon for five men, and you'll have friends who will take good care of you and Chunk."

"De Lawd he'p me! w'at comin' nex'? Miss Lou wuz a wishin' sump'n ud hap'n—w'at ain' gwinter hap'n?"

"Nothing will happen to harm you if you do as I say. Our men may soon be marching this way, and we'll remember our friends when we come."

"I des hope dere'll be sump'n lef ob me ter reckermember," said Aun' Jinkey, but she rose to comply with the soldier's requirement, feeling that her only course was to fall in with the wishes of whoever happened to be uppermost in the troublous times now foreseen. She was in a terribly divided state of mind. The questions she had smoked and thought over so long now pressed with bewildering rapidity and urgency. An old family slave, she had a strong feeling of loyalty to her master and mistress. But they had been partially alienating Miss Lou, for whom she would open her veins, while her grandson was hot for freedom and looked upon Northern soldiers as his deliverers. Aun' Jinkey was not sure she wished to be delivered. That was one of the points she was not through "projeckin' " about. Alas! events would not wait for her conclusions, although more time had been given her than to many others forced to contemplate vast changes. With a shrewd simplicity she decided that it would be wise to keep

on friendly terms with all the contending powers, and do what in ner judgment was best for each.

"Hit des took all de 'visions we got," she remarked, disconsolately.

"You'll soon have visions of more to eat and wear than ever blessed your eyes," said Scoville, encouragingly.

"Hi! granny," said Chunk, peeping in at the door.

"How you start me!" ejaculated the old woman, sinking into her chair.

"That you, Chunk?" asked Scoville. "Is the coast clear?"

"I reck'n. Keep shy yet a while, mars'r." A few words explained the situation, and Chunk added: "You des feed dem Yankees big, granny. I'se pervide mo'. I mus' go now sud'n. Made Aun' Suke b'lebe dat I knowed ob chickens w'at roos' in trees, en dey tinks I'se lookin' fer um. High ole times up ter de house," and he disappeared in the darkness.

In nervous haste Aun' Jinkey prepared the ample supper. Scoville hooted again, a shadowy form stole to the cabin for the food, and disappeared again toward the run. Then Aun' Jinkey prepared to compose her nerves by another smoke.

"Hand me up a coal for my pipe, also," said Scoville, "and then we'll have a sociable time."

"I des feared onsosh'ble times dis eb'nin'," remarked Aun' Jinkey.

"If you knew how my bones ached, you'd help me pass the time."

"Reck'n mine ache, too, 'fo' I troo wid dis bus'ness."

"No, Aunt Jinkey, you won't be punished for doing a good deed. Your young mistress is on your side, anyway. Who is she?"

"Young mistis ain' got no po'r ef dey fin's out. She nuff ter do ter hol' 'er own."

"How comes it she's friendly to 'we uns,' as you say down here?"

"She ain' friendly. You drap at her feet ez ef you wuz dead, en she hab a lil gyurlish, soft heart, dat's all. Didn't she tole you dat she ain' on yo' side?"

"Well, bless her heart, then."

"I circumscribe ter dat ar."

"Aren't you on our side?"

"I'se des 'twix en 'tween all de sides."

"You're all right, Aunt Jinkey. I'd trust you with my life."

"Reck'n you hab ter dis eb'nin'."

"Well, about Miss Lou—you say she has trouble to hold her own. How's that?"

"Dem's fambly matters."

"And so none of my business, unless she tells me herself."

"How she gwine ter tol' you tings?"

"Ah, Aunt Jinkey, you've vegetated a great while in these slow parts. I feel it in my bones, sore as they are, that some day I'll give you a new dress that will make you look like a spike of red hollyhocks. You'll see changes you don't dream of."

"My haid whirlin' now, mars'r. Hope ter grashus I kin do my wuk ter-morrer in peace and quietness."

There was neither peace nor quietness at the mansion. Whately, with a soldier's instincts to make the most of passing opportunities, added to the hasty tendencies of his own nature, was not only enjoying the abundant supper, but feasting his eyes meantime on the charms developed by his cousin in his absence. He knew of his uncle's wish to unite the two plantations, and had given his assent to the means, for it had always been his delight to tease, frighten, and pet his little cousin, whose promise of beauty had been all that he could desire. Now she evoked a sudden flame of passion, and his mind, which leaped to conclusions, was already engaged in plans for consummating their union at once. He sought to break down her reserve by paying her extravagant compliments, and to excite her admiration by accounts of battles in which he would not

have posed as hero so plainly had he not been flushed with wine. There was an ominous fire in her eyes scarcely in accord with her cool demeanor. Unused to the world, and distrusting her own powers, she made little effort to reply, taking refuge in comparative silence. This course encouraged him and her uncle. The former liked her manifestation of spirit as long as he believed it to be within control. To his impetuous, imperious nature the idea of a tame, insipid bride was not agreeable; while Mr. Baron, still under the illusion that she was yet but a submissive child, thought that her bad mood was passing and would be gone in the morning. He little dreamed how swiftly her mind was awakening and developing under the spur of events. She did not yet know that her cousin was meditating such a speedy consummation of his purpose, but was aware that he and all her relatives looked upon her as his predestined wife. Now, as never before, she shrank from the relation, and in the instinct of self-preservation resolved never to enter into it.

Her long, rebellious reveries in solitude had prepared her for this hour, and her proud, excited spirit surprised her by the intensity of its passionate revolt. Not as a timid, shrinking maiden did she look at her cousin and his men feasting on the piazza. She glanced at him, then through the open windows at their burly forms, as one might face a menace which brought no thought of yielding.

The family resemblance between Whately and herself was strong. He had her blue eyes, but they were smaller than hers, and his expression was bold, verging toward recklessness. Her look was steady and her lips compressed into accord with the firm little chin.

Mrs. Baron's ideas of decorum soon brought temporary relief. She also saw that her nephew was becoming too excited to make a good impression, so she said, "Louise, you may now retire, and I trust that you will waken tomorrow to the truth that your natural guardians can best direct your thoughts and actions."

Whately was about to rise in order to bid an affectionate good-night, but the girl almost fled from the room. In the hall she met Chunk, who whispered, "Linkum man gittin' peart, Miss Lou."

"She'll be over her tantrum by morning," said Mr. Baron in an apologetic tone. "Perhaps we'll have to humor her more in little things."

"That's just where the trouble lies, uncle. You and aunt have tried to make her feel and act as if as old as yourselves. She's no longer a child; neither is she exactly a woman. All young creatures at her age are skittish. Bless you, she wouldn't be a Baron if she hadn't lots of red, warm blood. So much the better. When I've married her she'll settle down like other Southern girls."

"I think we had better discuss these matters more privately, nephew," said Mrs. Baron.

"Beg pardon, I reckon we had, aunt. My advice, however, is that we act first and discuss afterward."

"We'll talk it over to-morrow, nephew," said Mr. Baron. "Of course as guardian I must adopt the best and safest plan."

Chunk's ears were long if he was short, and in waiting on a soldier near the window he caught the purport of this conversation.

CHAPTER V

WHATELY'S IDEA OF COURTSHIP

WHEN waiting on the table, Zany either stood like an image carved out of black walnut or moved with the angular promptness of an automaton when a spring is touched. Only the quick roll of her eyes indicated how observant she was. If, however, she met Chunk in the hall, or anywhere away from observation, she never lost the opportunity to torment him. A queer grimace, a surprised stare, an exasperating derisive giggle, were her only acknowledgments of his amorous attentions. "Ef I doesn't git eben wid dat niggah, den I eat a mule," he muttered more than once.

But Chunk was in great spirits and a state of suppressed excitement. "'Pears ez ef I mout own mysef 'fo' dis moon done waxin' en wanin'," he thought. "Dere's big times comin,' big times. I'se yeard w'at hap'n w'en de Yanks go troo de kentry like an ol bull in a crock'ry sto'." In his duties of waiting on the troopers and clearing the table he had opportunities of purloining a goodly portion of the viands, for he remembered that he also had assumed the rôle of host with a very meagre larder to draw upon.

Since the Confederates were greatly wearied and were doubly inclined to sleep from the effects of a hearty supper and liberal potations, Mr. Baron offered to maintain a watch the early part of the night, while Perkins was enjoined to sleep with one eye open near the quarters. Mattresses and quilts were brought down and spread on the piazza floor, from which soon rose a nasal chorus, "des like," as Chunk declared, "a frog-pon' in full blas'."

Whately, trained in alert, soldierly ways, slept on the sofa in the parlor near his men. One after another the lights were extinguished, and the house became quiet. Chunk was stealing away with his plunder through the shrubbery in the rear of the house, when he was suddenly confronted by Zany. 'Hi! you niggah!" she whispered, 'I'se cotch you now kyarin' off nuff vittles ter keep you a mont. You gwinter run away."

"You wanter run wid me?" asked Chunk, unabashed.

"What you took me fer?"

"Fer better er wuss, w'ite folks say. Reck'n it ud be fer wuss in dis case."

"I reck'n de wuss ain' fur off. I des step ter ole mars'r an' tell 'im ter 'vestigate yo' cabin dis eb'nin'," she said, and, with a great show of offended dignity, she was about to move away.

"Look yere, Zany, doan yer be a fool. Doan you wanter be a free gyurl?"

"Ef you had me fer wuss I'd be des 'bout ez free ez Miss Lou w'en she mar'ed ter Mad Whately."

"Hi! you year dat, too?"

"I got eyes, en I got years, en you ain' gwinter light out dis night en lebe yo' granny en we uns. I sut'ny put a spoke in yo' wheel dat stop hits runnin'."

Chunk was now convinced that he would have to take Zany into his confidence. He looked cautiously around, then whispered rapidly in her ear. "Hi!" she exclaimed, softly, "you got longer head dan body."

"I kin reach ter yo' lips," said Chunk, snatching a kiss.

"Stop dat foolishness!" she exclaimed, giving him a slight cuff.

"Zany, keep mum ez a possum. Dere's big times comin', en no un kin hender um, dough dey kin git deysefs in a heap ob trouble by blarnations. De Linkum men soon gwine ter be top of de heap an I'se gwinter be on top wid um. Dar you be, too, ef you stan's by Miss Lou en me."

"Ve'y well, but I'se gwinter keep my eye on you, Marse Chunk."

"Reck'n you will, kaze I ain' gwinter be fur off; en ef you puts yo' eye on some oder man, you soon fin' he ain' dar." With this ominous assurance he stole away.

Soon afterward the hoot of an owl was heard again; shadows approached the cabin; Scoville, assisted by Chunk, joined them, and there was a whispered consultation. Scoville put the result in the following words:

"The chance is a good one, I admit. It is quite possible that we could capture the Johnnies and their horses, but that's not what we're out for. Besides, I'm too badly broken up. I couldn't ride to-night. You must go back to camp, and leave me to follow. Chunk here has provisions for you. Better be moving, for Whately will probably be out looking for you in the morning."

So it was decided, and the shadows disappeared. Scoville was put into Aun' Jinkey's bed, the old woman saying that she would sit up and watch. Chunk rubbed the bruised and aching body of the Union scout till he fell asleep, and then the tireless negro went to the spot where the poor horse had died in the stream. He took off the saddle and bridle. After a little consideration he diverted the current, then dug a hole on the lower side of the animal, rolled him into it, and changed the brook back into its old channel. Carefully obliterating all traces of his work, he returned to the cabin, bolted the door, lay down against it so that no one could enter, and was soon asleep.

The next morning dawned serenely, as if Nature had no sympathy with the schemes and anxieties to which the several actors in our little drama wakened. Whately was early on foot, for he felt that he had much to accomplish. Mr. Baron soon joined him, and the young man found in his uncle a ready coadjutor in his plans. They were both in full accord in their desires, although governed by different motives. The old man was actuated by his long-indulged greed for land, and wholly under the dominion of his belief

that one of the chief ends of marriage was to unite estates. In this instance he also had the honest conviction that he was securing the best interests of his niece. No one could tell what would happen if the invaders should appear, but he believed that the girl's future could best be provided for in all respects if she became the wife of a Confederate officer and a representative of his family.

Sounds of renewed life came from all directions; the troopers rolled up their blankets, and went to look after their horses; Mrs. Baron bustled about, giving directions for breakfast; Chunk and Zany worked under her eye as if they were what she wished them to be, the automatic performers of her will; Aun' Suke fumed and sputtered like the bacon in her frying-pan, but accomplished her work with the promptness of one who knew that no excuses would be taken from either master or mistress; Miss Lou dusted the parlor, and listened stolidly to the gallantries of her cousin. He was vastly amused by her reserve, believing it to be only maidenly coyness.

Breakfast was soon served, for Whately had announced to Mr. Baron his intention of scouting in the woods where the Federals had disappeared; also his purpose to visit his home and summon his mother to his contemplated wedding. He and his men soon rode away, and the old house and the plantation resumed their normal quiet aspect.

It had been deemed best not to inform Miss Lou of her cousin's immediate purpose until his plans were a little more certain and matured. Circumstances might arise which would prevent his return at once. Moreover, he had petitioned for the privilege of breaking the news himself. He believed in a wooing in accordance with his nature, impetuous and regardless at the time of the shy reluctance of its object; and it was his theory that the girl taken by storm would make the most submissive, contented and happy of wives; that women secretly admired men who thus asserted their will and strength, if in such assertion every form was complied with, and the impression given

that the man was resistless because he could not resist the charms which had captivated him. "Why, uncle," he had reasoned, "it is the strongest compliment that a man can pay a woman, and she will soon recognize it as such. When once she is married, she will be glad that she did not have to hesitate and choose, and she will always believe in the man who was so carried away with her that he carried her away. My course is best, therefore, on general principles, while in this particular instance we have every reason for prompt action. Lou and I have been destined for each other from childhood, and I'm not willing to leave her to the chances of the hurly-burly which may soon begin. As my wife I can protect her in many ways impossible now."

CHAPTER VI

THE STORM BEGINS

OF late years Aun' Jinkey's principal work had been the fine washing and ironing of the family, in which task she had always been an adept. For this reason she had been given the cabin near the run and an unusually fine spring. Miss Lou felt a kindly solicitude and not a little curiosity in regard to the man who in a sense had been thrown at her feet for protection. So gathering up some of her laces, she made them an excuse for another visit to Aun' Jinkey. Mrs. Baron readily acquiesced, for she felt that if there was to be a wedding, the whole house must be cleaned from top to bottom. Moreover, by such occupation her mind could be diverted from the dire misgivings inspired by the proximity of Yankees. Under the circumstances, it would be just as well if her niece were absent.

As the girl passed down through the shrubbery, she found Chunk apparently very busy. Without looking up he said, "Doan be afeard, Miss Lou, I'se be on de watch. Marse Linkum man right peart dis mawnin'."

Aun' Jinkey was at her washtub near the door, and the cabin presented the most innocent aspect imaginable. "Good-morning," said the girl, affably. "How is your patient?"

"Recovering rapidly, thanks to your kindness and the good friends in whose care you placed me," answered a hearty voice from the doorway.

Aun' Jinkey made a sort of rush to the door, exclaiming in tones that were low, yet almost stern, "Marse Lin-

kum man, ef you show yo'sef—ef you doan stay by dat ar ladder so you git up sud'n, I des troo wid dis bus'ness! Tain' far ter dem w'at's reskin' dere bodies en a'most dere souls!"

"You are right, aunty," said Scoville, retreating. "It's wrong for me to do anything which might bring trouble to you or Chunk; but I was so eager to thank this other good Samaritan—"

"Well, den, sit by de ladder dar, en Miss Lou kin sit on de do'step. Den a body kin feel tings ain' comin' ter smash 'fo' dey kin breve."

"Good Samaritan!" repeated Miss Lou, taking her old place in the doorway where she had so recently wished something would happen; "you have not fallen among thieves, sir."

"My fear has been that you would think that a thief had fallen among the good Samaritans. I assure you that I am a Union soldier in good and regular standing."

"I reckon my uncle and cousin would scout the idea that you, or any of your army, had any standing whatever."

"That does not matter, so that I can convince you that I would not do or say anything unbecoming a soldier."

"You are a Yankee, I suppose?" she asked, looking at him with strong yet shyly expressed interest.

"I suppose I am, in your Southern vernacular. I am from New York State, and my name is Allan Scoville."

"Uncle says that you Yankees are terrible fellows."

"Do I look as if I would harm you, Miss Lou? Pardon me, I do not know how else to address you."

"Address me as Miss Baron," she replied, with a droll little assumption of girlish dignity.

"Well, then, Miss Baron, you have acted the part of a good angel toward me."

"I don't like such talk," she replied, frowning. "You were merely thrown helpless at my feet. You didn't look as if you could do the South much harm then. What I may feel to be my duty hereafter—"

"I have no fears at all of what *you* may do," he interrupted, with a smile that made his expression very pleasing.

"How so?"

"Because you are incapable of betraying even an enemy, which I am not to you. On the contrary, I am a grateful man, who would risk his life to do you a service. The little unpleasantness between the North and South will pass away, and we shall all be friends again."

"My uncle and cousin—indeed all the people I know—will never look upon you Northern soldiers as friends."

"Never is a long time. I certainly feel very friendly toward you."

"I wish you to know that I am a Southern girl," she replied stiffly, "and share in the feelings of my people."

"Well, I'm a Northern man, and share in the feelings of my people. Can't we agree that this is fair and natural in each case?"

"But why do you all come marauding and trampling on the South?"

"I beg your pardon, Miss Baron, but your question opens up all the differences between the two sections. I have my views, but am not a politician—simply a soldier. You and I are not at war. Let us talk about something else. With your brave cousin enlisting your sympathies against our side, what use would there be of my saying anything?"

"My brave cousin does not enlist any of my sympathies; but that, certainly, is a matter which we cannot talk about."

"Pardon, but your reference to him made it natural—"

"There is no need of speaking of him," she interrupted, coldly. "I merely meant that he and those with him in what you slightingly term an unpleasantness can never be friendly to you. This war may be a small thing to you, but suppose your home and family were in danger, as ours are?"

"Can you think that this war is a holiday to me?" he

asked, gravely. "What stands between me now and death —perhaps a shameful and horrible death—except your kindly, womanly impulses? I am hourly in danger of being caught and treated as a spy."

"Oh, I didn't realize it," said the girl, simply and kindly. "Everything looks so quiet and lovely. Aun' Jinkey, there, my old mammy, is at work just as I have seen her for years, and Chunk is busy yonder in the garden. It is hard to think how suddenly all might change."

"A soldier must think and be prepared."

"Have you no fear?"

"Life is sweet to me. I know only one thing—I must do my duty and trust in God. I have the consolation that no one is dependent on me; no one would grieve for me very much. I'm quite alone in the world. My crusty old guardian would inherit my property, and you may well guess that Aunt Jinkey's tub yonder would hold all his tears if I should make a sudden exit," and again he smiled in his pleasant way, as if with the purpose to relieve his words of all sombreness.

"Are you an orphan, too?" she asked sympathetically.

"Such a mature, fully developed orphan as I am is not an object of pity, Miss Baron," he replied, laughing. Then he added, a little proudly: "I'm nearly twenty-two; I was twenty-one on my last birthday, and I celebrated it by a ride only less risky than the one which landed me at your feet. But your little word 'too' suggests that you are somewhat alone, also. I hope that your father was not killed in this war?"

"No, my father and mother died long before the war."

"I am glad of that—not glad that they died, but that you cannot associate me with the causes of their death."

"But you and yours have caused death and suffering to so many Southern people!"

"Yes, I'm sorry it is so, but things are pretty even on that score. Your men give as many blows as they take."

"Why did you enter the army?"

"I suppose for about the same reasons that your cousin did."

"Oh, you aren't like my cousin at all. I don't wish you to keep referring to him."

"Well, then, I thought it was right. There was an urgent call for men and strong public feeling. I was at college. I couldn't see others go and not go with them. I had no influence, no one to push my interests, so I simply enlisted, and am trying to push my way by extra services. Now, Miss Baron, think for yourself a little. Here we are, two young people thrown together by a strange chance. We have been brought up differently, surrounded by different influences. Even if you think me wrong, can you not believe that I've followed my conscience and lived up to such light as I had? I can believe this of you. I don't wish you to think that we Yankees are monsters. Do I look like a monster? Why, Miss Baron, if I should live to be a hundred years I should regard a chance to do you a kindness as the best good-fortune that could befall me."

As he spoke these words his face flushed, there was a slight quiver in his dark mustache, betokening deep, honest feeling, and his expression was one of frank admiration and respect. She looked at him in silent wonder, and asked herself, "Can this be one of the Yankees of whom I have heard such horrible things?"

She began saying, "I am trying to think for myself, but I have been so shut out from the world that—" when she was suddenly interrupted. Chunk appeared and said, "Marse Scoville, des git up de ladder en shut de trap-do' quicker'n lightnin'. Miss Lou, kin'er peramberlate slow to'rd de house, des nachel like ez ef you ain' keerin' 'bout not'n. Wash away, granny. Play possum, ev'y one."

Miss Lou had gone but a little way before Mad Whately joined her, having ordered his men to pass on before. "Chunk," he shouted, "take my horse and rub him well, or you'll get rubbed down yourself."

The openings under the eaves in Aun' Jinkey's cabin were so many and large that Scoville had fairly good opportunities for observing what was going on in the immediate vicinity. In witnessing the meeting between Whately and Miss Lou he was conscious of a peculiar satisfaction when noting that her manner confirmed her words. The dashing cousin evidently was not in favor. "Well," thought the scout, with a decisive little nod toward him, "were I a young Southerner, you'd have a rival that would put you to your best speed. What a delicious little drawl she has in speaking, and how charmingly her consonants shade off into vowels! I would be more readily taken for a Southerner than she, if I did not speak. How blue her eyes are! and her fluffy hair seemed a golden halo when the sunshine touched it through the trees. And then how unsophisticated her face and expression! She is a lady from instinct and breeding, and yet she is but a sweet-faced child. Well! well! it was an odd chance to be pitched to the feet of a girl like that. Very possibly I'd be there again of my own free will should I see her often enough."

If Scoville were a rival now he certainly would have to take a wild pace to keep up with Mad Whately in his wooing. His eyes were full of resolute fire as he walked beside his cousin, and her quick intuition took speedy alarm at his expression. "Well, sweet coz," he said, "the Yanks have very prudently dusted back to the region from which they came. My mother will give herself the pleasure of a visit at The Oaks this afternoon. Can you guess her object in coming?"

"Why, as you say, to give herself the pleasure of a visit."

"Yes, and you and I will enhance her pleasure a thousand-fold."

"I shall do all that I can in courtesy."

"I'll do the rest, for I shall gladden her heart by marrying you."

"What!"

"Simply that, nothing more. Isn't that enough?"

"Far too much," replied the girl, hotly. "I don't like such jesting."

"Faith and it will prove the best joke of our lives, over which we will often laugh at our fireside hereafter. Come now, cousin, make the best of it; it is the best for you as well as for me. You know I always intended to marry you, and I have the hearty sanction of all the high contracting powers."

She stopped abruptly in the path, her face so rich in angry color that it shamed the flowers blooming in the shrubbery near.

"Mr. Whately," she said, firmly, "there is one contracting power that you have not consulted. How can you marry me when I *will* not marry you?"

"Nothing easier, pretty coz."

"But how—how?"

"Oh, that you will learn at the proper time. Everything shall go as simply, naturally and merrily as fate. The blessing of parent and guardian, the clergyman in robes, prayer-book, wedding feast—nothing shall be wanting."

"This is absurd talk," she cried, and rushed to the house. In the upper hall she encountered her aunt engaged in superintending a general dusting and polishing of the old-fashioned furniture.

"What is the meaning of this wild talk of Cousin Madison?" the girl asked, breathlessly.

"I've heard no wild talk," was the cool response.

"Well, come into my room and hear it, then."

Mrs. Baron reluctantly followed, rather aggrieved that she must bear the first brunt of the storm.

"What are you putting the house in such wonderful order for?" asked Miss Lou, with flashing eyes. "What do all these preparations mean? What is Aunt Whately coming here for this evening?"

"It is very natural she should wish to be present at her son's wedding," was the quiet and exasperating answer.

"When is this wedding to be?" was the next query, accompanied by a harsh laugh.

"I think we can be ready by to-morrow evening."

"Are you a woman, that you can thus try to sacrifice the motherless girl committed to your charge?"

"So far from sacrificing you, I am trying to further your best interests, and at the same time carrying out the wishes of my husband and your guardian. These are solemn times, in which you need every safeguard and protection. We should be faithless, indeed, to our trust did we not give a brave soldier the best right in the world to shield and care for you."

"Bah!" cried the girl, now almost furious. "Where's uncle?"

"In his office, I suppose."

Whately had preceded her thither, and had already made known to Mr. Baron the nature of his interview with his cousin, adding: "Our best policy will be just to take our course as a matter of course, in a genial, friendly way. We certainly are the girl's best friends, and it won't be long before she acknowledges the fact. All we do is to secure her safety, welfare and happiness. She will be as skittish as a blooded filly over it all at first—a feature in the case which only increases my admiration and affection. She doesn't and can't realize the need of the step, how it's best for all concerned in general and herself in particular. The thing to do, therefore, is to go right straight along. Mother will be here this evening, and will do much toward talking her into it. Lou's anger and revolt will probably be well over by to-morrow, and all—"

Further predictions were interrupted by the swift entrance of the girl. She stood still a moment and regarded the two men in silent scorn. "So you are plotting?" she said at last.

"Oh, dear, no, sweet coz. Nothing is more foreign to my nature than plotting. I am a man of action."

"If your words have any truth or meaning, you are bent on very dishonorable action."

"Far from it. I shall have the sanction of both Church and State."

"This, then, is the boasted Southern chivalry of which I have heard so much."

"It has been knightly in all times to protect and rescue lovely woman."

"I need no protection, except against you. Please leave the room. I wish to speak to uncle."

He attempted to kiss her hand as he passed out, but she snatched it away. "Uncle," she said, coming directly to him, "can it be that you sanction anything so wicked as this? It seems as if you and aunt were permitting my cousin to put upon me a cruel practical joke."

"Ahem! Your very words, Louise, prove how unfit you are to judge and act in accordance with this emergency. You even dream that we are in a mood for jesting at this time, when our days and even hours may be numbered. No, indeed. I am resolved to unite with my protection all the power and dignity vested in a Confederate officer."

"In other words, to shield me against some possible danger you will try to inflict on me the worst thing that could happen."

"Hoity-toity! Is an honorable marriage which has always been contemplated the worst that could happen? If we are driven forth by hordes of Northern vandals, you would think it the best thing that had happened."

"I don't fear these Northern vandals. I have"—and then she checked herself in time.

"You don't fear them! Why, Louise, every word you speak makes it more imperative that I should act for one so utterly inexperienced and ignorant."

"Do you actually mean to say that you will try to marry me against my will?"

"Certainly, against your present will. Do you suppose that I can be guided in my solemn trust by your petulance, your ignorant notions of life, and your almost childish passion? In France, the most civilized country in the world,

parents and guardians arrange these affairs as a matter of course, and with the best results. It is the general method all over the world. Far more than mere family and pecuniary interests are concerned in this instance. We are giving you a protector in the time of your deepest need."

"How could Lieutenant Whately protect me if the Yankees should come in numbers?"

"In more ways than you can imagine. Moreover, he would probably be permitted to escort you and your mother to a place of safety. You would have his name, and the name of a Confederate officer would always entitle you to respect."

"Oh, this is dreadful!" cried the girl, bewildered and almost paralyzed by the old man's inexorable words and manner. So unsophisticated was she, so accustomed to be governed, that the impression was strong that she could be controlled even in this supreme crisis.

She rushed into the parlor, where her cousin was striding up and down in a whirl of the glad excitement so congenial to his spirit. "Cousin Madison," she exclaimed, "I know you are hasty and impetuous, but generous impulses should go with such a nature. You surely will not use your advantage against an orphan girl?"

"No, indeed, dear coz, not against, but for you. I love you too well to leave you to the chances of war."

"Oh, but this is the certainty of evil. You know I do not love you. If you would wait—if you would give me time to think it all over—"

"Why, so you shall when I've escorted you and mother to some place where none can molest or make you afraid."

"Escort me, then, as I am, under your mother's care. Truly this would be a better way to win my heart than such hasty violence to all my feelings and wishes."

"My dear Louise, you may think me a hasty, inconsiderate wooer to-day, but that is because you do not know all that I know. I must, like your guardians, be guided by your best welfare. When you learn to know me as a kind,

loyal, considerate husband, you will appreciate my most friendly and decisive action at this time. You are in great danger; you may soon be homeless. In the case of one so young and fair as you are, those who love you, as you know I do passionately, must act, not in accordance with your passing mood, but in a way to secure your peace and honor for all time."

"Oh, this is all a terrible dream! You can—you can protect me as your cousin, should I need any such protection, which I cannot believe. Northern soldiers are not savages. I know it! I know it!"

"How can you know it? Have I not seen more of them than you have? I tell you that for the honor of our house I shall and will give you the protection of my name at once. Your uncle and aunt feel as strongly as I do about it, and your happiness will be the only result. We Southern people take no chances in these matters."

Overwhelmed, frightened, bewildered, the girl left the room and mournfully climbed to her own apartment. She was too utterly absorbed in her own desperate plight to observe Zany whisking away in the background.

CHAPTER VII

DANGERS THICKENING

MR. BARON was scarcely less miserable than his ward, yet from wholly different causes. His anxieties concerning her were deep indeed, his very solicitude impelling him toward the plan which he was eager to consummate. He was distracted by fears and forebodings of every kind of evil; he was striving to fortify his mind against the dire misgiving that the Confederacy was in a very bad way, and that a general breaking up might take place. Indeed his mental condition was not far removed from that of a man who dreads lest the hitherto immutable laws of nature are about to end in an inconceivable state of chaos. What would happen if the old order of things passed away and the abominable abolitionists obtained full control? He felt as if the door of Dante's Inferno might be thrown wide at any moment. There was no elasticity in his nature, enabling him to cope with threatening possibilities; no such firmness and fortitude of soul as he might be required to exercise within the next few hours. To start with, he was wretched and distracted by the breaking up of the methodical monotony of his life and household affairs. Since general wreck and ruin might soon ensue, he had the impulses of those who try to secure and save what is most valuable and to do at once what seems vitally important. Amid all this confusion and excitement of mind his dominant trait of persistence asserted itself. He would continue trying to the last to carry out the cherished schemes and purposes of his life; he would not stultify himself by changing his principles, or even the daily routine of his life, as

far as he could help himself. If events over which he had no control hastened action, such action should be in harmony with previous purpose to the extent of his power. The plan, therefore, of marrying his niece immediately to her cousin doubly commended itself to him. It would throw around her additional safeguards and relieve him in part from a heavy responsibility; it would also consummate one of the cherished intentions of his life. Things might take a happy turn for the better, and then just so much would be gained and accomplished.

Thus he reasoned, and his nephew spared no pains in confirming his views. The truth urged by his niece that she did not love her cousin seemed a small matter to the unemotional, legal mind of the old man when safety and solid interests were concerned. "A child like Louise," he said, "must be taken care of, not humored." Mrs. Baron had long since formed the habit of yielding complete deference to her husband, and now was sincerely in accord with his views. She had never had much heart; her marriage had satisfied her ambition, had been pleasing to her kith and kin, and she saw no good reason why her niece should not, under any circumstances, form a similar union. That the girl should revolt now, in the face of such urgent necessity, was mere perverseness. Sharing in her husband's anxieties and fears, she found solace and diversion of mind in her beloved housekeeping. Neither of the old people had the imagination or experience which could enable them to understand the terror and distress of their niece, whom with good intentions they were driving toward a hated union.

Dinner was served two hours later than usual—a fact in itself very disturbing to Mr. Baron; while Aun' Suke, compelled to cook again for the Confederate troopers, was in a state of suppressed irritation, leading her satellites to fear that she might explode. Small, pale and bloodless as "ole miss" appeared, none of her domestics dared to rebel openly; but if any little darky came within the reach of Aun'

Suke's wooden spoon, she relieved her feelings promptly. In dining-room and kitchen, therefore, was seething and repressed excitement. The very air was electric and charged with rumors.

Perkins, the overseer, was at his wits' end, also, about the field-hands. They were impassive or sullen before his face, and abounding in whispers and significant glances behind his back. What they knew, how much they knew, he could not discover by any ingenuity of questioning or threatening, and he was made to feel that excessive harshness might lead to serious trouble. Disturbing elements were on all sides, in the air, everywhere, yet he could not lay his finger on any particular culprit.

Of all the slaves on the plantation, Chunk appeared the most docile and ready to oblige every one. He waited on the Confederate troopers with alacrity, and grinned at their chaffing with unflagging good-nature. In all the little community, which included an anxious Union scout, Chunk was about the most serene and even-pulsed individual. Nature had endowed him with more muscle than nerves, more shrewdness than intellect, and had quite left out the elements of fear and imagination. He lived intensely in the present; excitement and bustle were congenial conditions, and his soul exulted in the prospect of freedom. Moreover, the fact that he had proved himself to Zany to be no longer a mere object for ridicule added not a little to his elation. Shrewd as himself, she was true to her word of keeping an eye on him, and she was compelled to see that he was acting his part well.

Miss Lou positively refused to come down to dinner. She had buried her face in her pillow, and was almost crying her eyes out; for in the confusion of her mind, resulting from her training and inexperience, she feared that if all her kin insisted on her marriage, and gave such reasons as had been urged upon her, she must be married. She was sorely perplexed. Could the Yankees be such ravening wolves as her uncle and cousin represented them to be? Certainly

one was not, but then he might be different from the others because he had been to college and was educated.

"He said he would be glad to do me any kindness," she sobbed. "Oh, if he could only prevent this marriage! Yet what can he do? I could not even speak to a stranger of my trouble, much less to a Northern soldier. I wish I could see my old mammy. She's the only one who in the least understands me and feels a little like a mother toward me. Oh, what a dreadful thing to be a motherless girl at such a time!"

The powers below stairs concluded that it would be best to leave Miss Lou to herself for a time, that she might think over and become reconciled to the need and reasonableness of their action, but Mrs. Baron considerately sent up her dinner by Zany. The unhappy girl shook her head and motioned the tray away.

"Hi, now, Miss Lou, w'at you tookin on so fer?" asked the diplomatic Zany.

"For more than you can understand."

"I un'erstan's a heap mo'n you tink," said Zany, throwing off all disguise in her strong sympathy. "Marse Whately des set out ter mar'y you, ez ef you wuz a post dat cud be stood up en mar'd to enybody at eny time. Hi! Miss Lou, I'se bettah off dan you, fer I kin pick en choose my ole man."

"Everybody in the world is better off than I am."

"I wudn't stan' it, Miss Lou. I sut'ny wudn't. I'd runned away."

"How could I run away? Where could I go to?"

"See yere, Miss Lou," and Zany sank her voice to a whisper, "dere's a Linkum man"—

"Hush! how did you know that?"

"Chunk en me's fren's. Don' be 'feard, fer I'd like ter see de gyurl dat kin beat me playin' possum. Dat Linkum man he'p you ter run away."

"For shame, Zany! The idea of my going away with a stranger!"

"'Pears to me I'se rudder runned away wid one man dan hab anoder man runned away wid me."

"Don't ever speak to me of such a thing again."

"Well, den, Miss Lou, de niggahs on dis plantashon des lub you, en dey ain' hankerin' arter Marse Whately. Ef you say de wud, I des belebe dey riz right up again dis mar'age."

"Oh, horrible!" said the girl, in whose mind had been instilled the strong and general dread of a negro insurrection. "There, Zany, you and Chunk mean kindly, but neither you nor any one can help me. If either does or says anything to make a disturbance I'll never forgive you. My cousin and the men with him would kill you all. I'd rather be left alone, for I must think what to do."

"I ain' sayin' not'n, Miss Lou, sence dat yo' 'quest, but doan you gib up," and Zany took her departure, resolving to have a conference with Chunk at the earliest possible moment.

The impossible remedies suggested by Zany depressed Miss Lou all the more, for they increased her impression of the hopeless character of her position. She felt that she was being swept forward by circumstances hard to combat, and how to resist or whether she could resist, were questions which pressed for an immediate answer. She possessed a temperament which warned her imperatively against this hasty marriage, nor was there any hesitancy in her belief that it would blight her young life beyond remedy. She was not one to moan or weep helplessly very long, however, and the first gust of passion and grief having passed, her mind began to clear and face the situation. Looking out of her window, she saw that her cousin and his men were mounted and were about to ride away again. Having waited till they had disappeared, she bathed her eyes and then descended to her uncle.

"Where has Lieutenant Whately gone?" she asked.

"Your cousin does not forget, even at such a time, that he is a soldier, and he is scouting the country far and wide.

Moreover, it is his intention to ask the Rev. Dr. Williams to be here to-morrow evening, and a few friends also. I trust that by that time your perverse mood will pass away, and that you will unite with your kindred in their efforts in your behalf."

"Is there no use of reasoning with you, uncle—no use of pleading with you?"

Perkins stood in the door and knocked to announce his presence.

"Well, what is it?" asked Mr. Baron, nervously.

"Have you heard anything, sir?"

"Good heavens, no! Heard what?"

"Well, sir, I dunno. The field-hands are buzzing like bees, en I kyant get nothin' out of 'em."

"Well, Perkins, be watchful. Do your best. God only knows what's coming. You are well armed, I suppose?"

"You may reckon that, sir, en I'll use 'em too, ef need be. The hands are cute, mighty cute. I kyant lay my finger on any one in particular, but they're all a sort of bilin' up with 'citement."

"Best to stay among them and be stern and vigilant." When Perkins withdrew Mr. Baron said to his niece with strong emotion, "You see we are beset with danger, and you talk of reasoning and pleading against my best efforts for your safety. There! I'm too harassed, too overwhelmed with weighty subjects for consideration, to discuss this matter further. I must give my attention to securing some papers of vital importance."

Miss Lou departed with the feeling that dangers were thickening on every hand, and that she was only one of the causes for anxiety in her uncle's mind. She knew it would be useless to say anything to her aunt; and with a longing for a little sympathy and advice, she resolved on another visit to her old mammy, Aun' Jinkey.

The Union soldier had a remote place in the background of her thoughts, and yet she felt that it was preposterous to hope for anything from him.

CHAPTER VIII

"WHEN?"

THE vigilant eyes and constant demands of her mistress prevented Zany from giving Chunk more than a few significant hints, but he was quick to comprehend the situation. When he saw Miss Lou bending her steps toward his granny's cottage, he thanked his stars that the garden was in that direction also, and soon apparently was very busy at a good point from which to observe the cabin. In view of the approaching wedding Mrs. Baron had given Aun' Jinkey much to do, and she was busily ironing when Miss Lou again stood within the door. The old woman's fears had been so greatly aroused that she had insisted that Scoville should remain in the loft. "Folks 'll be comin' en gwine all the eb'nin', en ole miss hersef mout step dis away."

At the same time her heart ached for the young girl. At sight of the sweet, troubled face the faithful creature just dropped into a chair, and throwing her apron over her head, rocked back and forth, moaning "You po' chile, you po' chile!"

"Yes, mammy," cried Miss Lou, forgetting for the moment that a stranger was within hearing. "I'm in desperate straits, and I don't know what to do."

The trap-door was lifted instantly, and Scoville was about to descend.

"You mustn't do dat!" exclaimed Aun' Jinkey. "We's all in mis'ry anuff now."

"I hope that in no sense I am the cause of it," said Scoville, earnestly.

"Oh, no," replied Miss Lou, wiping her eyes hastily, "not directly. Pardon me, I forgot for the moment that you were here. My trouble is with my family, and you have nothing to do with it except as you Yankees are coming South and making trouble of every kind."

"Well, Miss Baron," said the scout, regarding her sympathetically through the open door, "it is too late to talk about our coming South. Isn't there something I can do for you, to show my gratitude and good-will?"

"Oh, no, indeed!"

"De bes' ting you kin do, Marse Scoville, is ter shet dat do' an' kep still; den git back ter yo' folks soon ez you kin trabble. We uns got des ez much ez we kin stan' up un'er, en ef dey foun' you yere, hit ud be de worl' comin' ter smash."

"If Miss Baron would tell me her trouble, she might find that I am not so powerless to help as I seem. Since she has done so much for me, I have a certain kind of right to do what I can in return."

"You forget, sir, that we are strangers and aliens."

"No one is an alien to me from whom I am accepting life and safety," and his glance was so kind and friendly that, in her dire extremity, she was induced to ask a question.

"If you feel that you owe anything to me," she said, hesitatingly, "tell me truly, if your people came to this plantation, would our home be burned and we all be in danger of insult and death?"

"Is that all you fear?" he asked, smiling.

"But answer me on your word and honor."

"No, Miss Baron, not from our regular troops. There are vile wretches connected with all armies, on your side as well as ours, who act without orders or any control except their lawless will. If you and your friends are tortured by the fear of Northern soldiers, should they come this way, you may set your mind comparatively at rest. I must add, however, that our troops have to live off the country, and so take food for man and beast. They also help them-

selves to better horses when they find them. I have told you the truth. Why, believe me, Miss Baron, I would defend you with my life against any one."

"Oh, dear!" cried the girl, with another rush of tears, "my uncle believes that our house will be burned and we all murdered, and they are going to marry me to my cousin against my will, so that he can take me to a place of safety."

"When?" asked Scoville, excitedly.

"To-morrow evening."

Aun' Jinkey in her trepidation had stepped to the door, and there, sure enough, was Mrs. Baron coming down the path with her hand full of crumpled muslins. She had appeared so silently and suddenly before Chunk that he had started and stared at her. When he tried to edge off toward the cabin, she had said, sharply, "Keep at your work. What is the matter with you? I reckon your granny is smoking instead of doing my work," and she hastened her steps to surprise the supposed delinquent.

Entering the cabin, she saw only Aun' Jinkey ironing, and her niece sitting with her handkerchief to her face. "Ah!" said the old lady to her laundress, "I'm glad you realize the importance of doing my work when it's needed." Then followed a few brief directions in regard to the articles she had brought. "Louise, I wish you to come with me. This is no place for you," concluded Mrs. Baron, turning to depart.

The girl rose and followed submissively, for she was overwhelmed by a confused sense of danger, not merely to the Union soldier, but also to her old mammy, who was sheltering him. The extremity of her fears and the fact that Chunk had not come to warn them led her to dread that her aunt's suspicions were already aroused. Chunk gave her a very anxious look as she passed, but she only shook her head slightly, as much as to say, "I don't know."

The negro's elation and confidence now passed utterly; he became deeply alarmed, not only for the scout, but for

himself and grandmother as well. He was not long in coming to a decision. Whately and his troopers were absent, and now, perhaps, was the best time to act. After satisfying himself that he was not observed, he slipped away to the cabin.

When Mrs. Baron finally disappeared, Aun' Jinkey sank into a chair almost in a state of collapse. "O good Lawd!" she gasped, "I des tremblin' so in my knee-jints I kyant stan'."

"Courage, Aunt Jinkey," said Scoville, through the chink in the floor. "Try to get Chunk here as soon as possible."

"I des done beat. I kyant lif my han' no mo'."

"Granny," said Chunk, sauntering in, "you des watch at de do'," and without waiting for a word he went up the ladder, lifted the door and closed it.

"Ah, Chunk, I wanted you badly," said Scoville. "Do you think it possible for me to get away at once?"

"Dat des w'at I come ter see 'bout, mars'r, en I'se gwine wid you. Marse Whately and he men all done gone till eb'nin'."

"Well, there's no need of further words. See what you can do about getting horses and a good start. I will explain on the way. Hoot like an owl when the coast is clear and you are ready."

A few moments later Chunk emerged from the cabin, with careless mien, eating a pone of hoecake.

"Go back to yer work," shouted Perkins, who was passing in the distance.

This Chunk did, his eyes following the overseer until the hated form was lost to sight in a distant field where a squad of hands were at work. Perkins was simply trying to be ubiquitous that day. Chunk's next step was to steal to the rear of the stables. To his delight he found that Whately had left his horse in order that it might rest for further hard service, and had borrowed one of his uncle's animals for the afternoon ride. As Chunk was stealthily

putting on a bridle, a gruff voice asked, "What yer doin' thar?"

The negro's heart stood still. Turning quickly, he saw, to his dismay, one of the Confederate soldiers lying on a pile of straw. A closer scrutiny revealed that the man was drowsy from partial intoxication, and Chunk, feeling that he was in for it now, said boldly: "Marse Whately tole me at dinner ter tek his hoss ter de run fer a drink en ter limber his jints 'bout dis time in de eb'nin'."

"Very well; bring 'im back safe en sud'n or I'll make you a head shorter'n you air."

"Ob co'se, mars'r, I do ez I tol'. I des ride ole bay down, too. Mout ez well took 'im ter water de same time."

The soldier making no response Chunk slipped away with the horses, trembling as if in an ague fit. Nothing was left for him now but to get away and take his chances. Fortune in this instance, as it often does, favored the bolder course. The Confederate soldier was familiar with Chunk, since he had been the waiter at the troopers' mess; moreover, his faculties were confused and blunted and he was soon asleep again. Perkins' back was turned and every one at the mansion deeply preoccupied. Even Zany, who had been charged not to leave the dining-room, was not on the watch.

Chunk hastened the horses down the lane toward the run, which having reached, he looked cautiously around, then hooted in fairly successful imitation of the ominous bird of night. Aun' Jinkey dropped into her chair again with an ejaculation of terror.

"Look out of the door and tell me if you see any one," said Scoville, quickly.

Mechanically she obeyed, saying, "No, mars'r, but dat squinch-owl des shook me like a ghos'."

Before she knew it he was beside her, his eyes shining with excitement. "There," he said, putting into the hand he pressed a ten-dollar bill, "I'll see you again, and you

won't be sorry. Good-by," and with a swift glance around he strode away toward the run. A moment or two later he was mounted on the bare back of Mad Whately's horse, following Chunk down the stream so that the flowing water might obliterate the hoof-prints. They soon left the water and put their horses to a gallop toward the forest, within whose shades they disappeared. Both had deemed best not to tell Aun' Jinkey of their departure, so that she might honestly plead ignorance.

With the unerring instinct of a scout the soldier led the way hour after hour toward the point where he expected to find the Union cavalry force. On the way he and Chunk compared notes, and thus Scoville more truly understood Miss Lou's position. "We must be back to-morrow afternoon," he said, "in time to prevent this marriage. So, Chunk, be careful. You must not get sleepy or let your horse stumble."

Leaving them to pursue their way to the northwest, we can return to The Oaks. Miss Lou followed her aunt into the house, burdened for the moment with a new and pressing anxiety. Did the resolute old lady suspect that one of the class which she most detested had been concealed within earshot of her voice, and would a search be instituted? The girl's sympathies had gone out to the stranger, and the fact that he so trusted her appealed strongly to her woman's nature. In her alienation from her relatives she was peculiarly isolated and lonely at just the period in life when she most craved appreciative understanding, and her intuitions led her to believe that this stranger could both understand and respect her feelings. His genial, kindly smile warmed her sore, lonely heart, and convinced her that there was a world of human affections and simple faith as well as of imperious wills and formal beliefs. His words in regard to himself and the North was another shock to her confidence in her uncle and aunt, and another proof that there was no good reason for the marriage they were forcing upon her.

For a brief time she watched with keen-eyed interest to

see if her aunt would take any steps to have Aun' Jinkey's cabin searched. Her mind was soon relieved on this score, for she became convinced that her uncle was distracted by various anxieties; while Mrs. Baron, from force of habit and with the purpose of diverting her mind from all she feared, was pursuing her preparations with restless energy, keeping every one in her employ as busy as herself. It was evident that her niece's idle hands and perturbed wanderings to and fro annoyed her, and at last she broke out: "Louise, it would be much more becoming in you to unite with me in my efforts. The idea of your sitting and idly bemoaning your case in that foolish old woman's cabin! I'm glad you had the grace to show obedience to me before her, for this is a time when to our people the example of obedience is most necessary, and you should be the first to set it in all respects. It will only increase the trouble which your uncle and Perkins are having if our people see that you are rebellious. There is much that you should be doing and seeing to, for your uncle says that it may be best for you to leave the plantation with Mrs. Whately and her son immediately after your marriage."

"I am not married yet. I shall appeal to Aunt Whately, and if she has a woman's heart she will not sanction the marriage."

"You will find that because she has a woman's heart, and a Baron's heart, she will sanction it and insist upon it."

"We shall see," replied the girl, turning to go to her room.

"Louise, it is my wish that you should put your things in order to be packed hastily, if need be."

Miss Lou made no answer.

CHAPTER IX

PARALYZED WITH SHAME

SO far from obeying her aunt's injunctions, Miss Lou sat down by her window, but she did not note the smiling spring landscape over which the western sun was throwing its long, misty rays. Tears so blurred her eyes and blinded her vision that she could scarcely see at all. At last she was aroused by the crunching of wheels, and became aware that Mrs. Whately had arrived. From what she knew of this aunt she had a good deal of hope from her appeal, for Mrs. Whately had always seemed a kind-hearted woman. True, she had been over-indulgent to her son, and, in her blind idolatry of this only child, blind to his faults, always comforting herself with the belief that he was merely high-spirited and would settle down when he grew older.

Miss Lou wished to speak to the mother before the son returned, and in the hope of securing a merciful ally in the lady, went down immediately to receive her. Mr. Baron was on the back porch calling, "Chunk, where in the mischief are you?" Where, indeed, with the start he had gained for the Union lines?

"My dear niece," cried Mrs. Whately, effusively, "how glad I am to see you, and to take you in my arms on this deeply interesting occasion!" but the matron was troubled at the girl's red eyes and pallid face.

"I will show you to your room at once," said Mrs. Baron to her guest, decisively and significantly.

Miss Lou was right in believing that the situation and the unhappy appearance of the prospective bride would be

explained. She had been forestalled in her chance to make an appeal. Mrs. Baron emphatically sustained her husband's purpose, concluding: "My dear sister, in this crisis you will have to take a firm stand with the rest of us. Louise is acting like a perverse child, and no more realizes the necessity and wisdom of our conrse than a baby."

Meantime the outcry for Chunk increased, and Miss Lou was troubled that he did not respond. Taking advantage of the fact that her mistress was upstairs, Zany stole swiftly, with many a misgiving, to Aun' Jinkey's cabin.

"Whar dat gran'boy o' you'n?" she asked, breathlessly.

"Ain' he in de gyardin?"

"No, he ain'. Does you *know* whar he is? Bettah tell me de truf. Mout sabe you a heap ob trouble."

"Des you min' yo' business, en doan cum trapesin' yere 'bout Chunk. You talks ez ef you own 'im."

"Ole mars'r tinks he own 'im, en he des a yellin' fer 'im. De oberseer hollerin', too, en de lil niggahs runnin' yere, dar, en yander lookin' fer 'im. Yere one ob um now."

With new and direful forebodings Aun' Jinkey declared loudly: "I doan know what he be. He ain' say not'n ter me 'bout gwine anywhar."

Uttering an angry and contemptuous exclamation, Zany sped back, and, with a scared look, said to Miss Lou, "Aun' Jinkey 'clar she dunno not'n 'bout Chunk's doin's. Ef she ain' foolin' me, I des belebe he's runned away."

At these tidings and at this suggestion the young girl was almost distracted. She went instantly to the cabin, supposing that it would soon be searched.

"Mammy!" she exclaimed, "where's Chunk?"

"Fo' de Lawd, honey, I doan know. I des gwine all ter pieces wid de goin's on."

"But people will be here looking. Is *he* up there?" asked the girl in a whisper.

"No, he des lit out two hour ago, en he guv me dis" (showing the money), "en say he see me agin. I'se feared he'n Chunk gwine off togeder."

"Well, you don't know. Hide the money and declare you don't know anything. I'll stand by you as far as I can."

As she hastened back she saw a Confederate soldier running toward the house and Perkins limping after him as fast as possible. Entering the rear door she heard the soldier demanding fiercely of her uncle, "Where's that cursed nigger you call Chunk?"

"Whom are you addressing, sir?" asked Mr. Baron, indignantly.

"Well, see yere, boss," was the excited reply, "this ere ain't no time fer standin' on nice words. That cursed nigger o' your'n took the lieutenant's horse ter the run fer a drink, en one o' your'n 'long of him, en me en Perkins kyant find nary one of 'em."

"Yes, sir," added Perkins in great wrath, "we uns follered the hoof-prints ter the run en inter the water, en there's no hoof-prints comin' back. That infernal nigger has lit out with the two horses."

"Why don't you go after him then?" shouted Mr. Baron, distracted with anger and accumulating perplexities. "He can't be far yet."

"I'd like ter see the hoss on this place that could ketch the lieutenant's black mare. Oh, why didn't I shoot the nigger?" and the soldier strode up and down as if demented.

"You deserve to be shot yourself, sir, if you, who had been placed on guard, permitted that black rascal to take the horses."

"Yes," replied the soldier, desperately, "en the lieutenant is ther man ter shoot me—cuss his red-hot blood!" and he stalked away toward the stables as if possessed by a sudden resolve.

Turning to enter the house, Mr. Baron encountered his niece, who had been a witness to the scene, which explained everything to her. "You see, you see," cried the old man, "everything going to rack and ruin! Would to Heaven

you could be married to-night and sent away to a place of safety!"

"Uncle," said the girl, almost fiercely, "did you not hear that man say of my cousin, 'curse his red-hot blood'? Is that the kind of a protector you would force upon me?"

"Yes," almost shouted the angry man, "because he has the spirit to deal justly with such reprobates. He's just the kind of protector you need in these lurid times, when it seems as if no one could be trusted. To think that that boy Chunk, who has been treated so well, could play us such an infernal trick! His old crone of a grandam must know something about it, and I'll make her tell. Perkins!" and Mr. Baron rushed toward the door again.

The ladies had now descended and joined the excited group on the veranda. Zany was listening with craned neck from the dining-room door, and other "yard folks," great and small, were gathering also.

"What *is* the matter?" cried Mrs. Baron.

Paying no heed to her, Mr. Baron said to his overseer, "Aun' Jinkey must know about this rascally flight and theft. Bring her here."

"Uncle," said Miss Lou, firmly, "Aun' Jinkey doesn't know anything about Chunk's disappearance. I've been to her cabin and asked her."

"As if the cunning old witch would tell you anything! Bring her here, I say, Perkins. It's time the spirit of insubordination on this place received a wholesome check."

"Why!" exclaimed Mrs. Baron, "it seems but a little while ago that Chunk was working quietly in the garden."

"En I reckon hit ain't much more'n two hours gone sence I seed 'im comin' out o' the cabin, lazin' and eatin' hoe-cake," added Perkins as he started angrily to obey his orders.

"He had mischief in his mind, though, now I think of it," resumed Mrs. Baron, "for he seemed startled when he saw me, and tried to edge away to the cabin. I thought he was afraid I would catch his granny smoking instead of

doing urgent work. Louise, you were in the cabin at the time. Why should Chunk be so anxious to get there before I did?"

"I have not spoken to him this afternoon, and know nothing of his movements except what I have heard," replied the girl, coldly.

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Whately, "what troublous times we've fallen upon!"

In the silence which followed they heard the gallop of a horse. A moment later a negro came running up and exclaiming, "Dat sojer in de stable des saddle he hoss en put out ez ef de debil wuz arter 'im!"

Miss Lou smiled bitterly as she thought, "He evidently doesn't think it wise to wait for my protector."

At this moment Mad Whately appeared cantering smartly up the avenue at the head of his men. Throwing his reins to a colored boy, he strode smilingly up the steps, exclaiming, "Why, this is a regular committee of reception. I am doubled honored since my fair cousin is present also."

Miss Lou made no reply, and the expression on all faces led him to ask quickly, "Why, what's the matter?"

The young man's brow grew black as Mr. Baron gave a hasty explanation. A half-suppressed oath rose to his lips as he turned on his heel and shouted to his men, "Halt, there! Let every man mount and await orders. Simson, you and two others follow the guard I left with my horse. Where's that nigger who saw him start? Here, you, put these men on his track as you value your life! Simson, take him, dead or alive!"

The men saluted, and departed at once. The galloping of their horses soon died away in the distance. "Now for this beldam," said Whately, sternly, as Aun' Jinkey approached, tottering in her excess of fear and accompanied by Perkins.

Miss Lou saw that her cousin was terribly excited; indeed, that he fairly trembled with passion. She was scarcely less stirred herself, for she possessed much of the hot blood

of her kindred, and during the last twenty-four hours nearly all that had occurred tended to fire her spirit. Now that she saw her own dear old mammy led cowering under the hostile eyes of every one, she was almost beside herself with pity and anger. Unaccustomed to conventional restraint, reacting from long years of repression, a child still in some respects, in others a passionate woman revolting at a fate from which her whole nature shrank, she was carried far above and beyond her normal condition, and was capable of following her impulses, whatever they might be.

Aun' Jinkey turned her eyes appealingly, and was awed, even in that terrible moment, by the intensity of the girl's expression, as she half consciously drew nearer and nearer. The field-hands, deeply excited, had also edged up from the quarters. Mr. Baron and his overseer observed yet tolerated this, thinking that it might be just as well to have the negroes learn from Aun' Jinkey's experience that authority would still be sternly enforced.

Whately's headlong temperament was so overcome by anger that he noted nothing except the presence of one whom he believed the aider and abetter in his great loss, for a favorite and trusty horse is one of the dearest possessions of a cavalryman.

"Where's your grandson?" he demanded, fiercely.

" '*Fo' de Lawd*, I dunno," gasped Aun' Jinkey.

"The truth, now, or you'll be sorry."

"I dunno, I dunno. Ef he gone, he ain' say neber a word ter me, not eben good-by."

"No use of your lying. You knew the rascal's purpose. Why didn't you tell Mr. Baron? Which way did he go?"

"I des declar, mars'r, I dunno."

"You *do* know," cried Whately, driven almost to frenzy, "and I'll cut the truth out of you."

His whip fell before he could arrest it, but it struck the arm and shoulder of Miss Lou. She had drawn very near, and, swift as light, had sprung forward and encircled the form of her mammy. There were startled exclamations

from those near, echoed by a groan from the negroes, and then the girl spoke in stern, deep tones, "You thought to strike *one* woman, and you have struck *two*."

Whately dropped his whip and stood with bowed head, paralyzed with shame. There were wild cries and a swaying of the field-hands toward the house. The mounted soldiers drew their revolvers and looked from the thronging black faces to that of their commander, but he paid no heed to them. Perkins did not wait, however, but drawing his weapon, began to limp toward the threatening mass, with oaths and orders to disperse. As for Mr. Baron and the ladies, they were just helpless in the whirl of events.

Although Miss Lou's back was toward this new phase of the drama, she instantly and instinctively comprehended it. With a fear almost hereditary, as well as one vaguely dreaded from childhood, she recognized the possible horrors of an insurrection, her own action the indirect cause. She turned and sprang forward so swiftly to interpose that her comb fell away, and her golden hair streamed behind her. She stood between the blacks and those who could harm them; also those whom, in their wild excitement, they were ready to attack.

"Silence!" she cried; then in the deep hush that followed she called out, in clear, ringing tones: "Every friend of mine will go back to quarters, keep quiet, and obey orders. I promise that no harm shall come to any of you."

The men doffed their ragged hats, and a voice from the crowd answered, "We 'bey you, Miss Lou, en we won' let no harm come ter you, noder." Then as the dense, angry mass of a hundred or more men and women melted away toward the quarters, it was seen that many a heavy club was carried among them. Miss Lou watched them silently two or three moments, the rest looking on in wonder and suppressed anger mingled with fear. The girl returned, and taking her mammy by the hand, was about to lead her into the house. Whately started as she essayed to pass him unheedingly, and seized her hand. "Lou, Cousin Lou,

forgive me!" he cried. "You know I meant you no such indignity."

"I know you mean me a greater one," she replied, coldly, withdrawing her hand.

"See! I ask your forgiveness on my knees!" he urged, passionately.

But her heart was steeled against him, for her very soul was hot with indignation. "Come, mammy," she said, firmly, "such shelter and protection as I still have in this house you shall share."

"Louise, this is monstrous!" began Mrs. Baron.

"*No!*" cried the girl. "This poor creature is the nearest approach I have ever known to a mother. She doesn't know about her grandson, and no one shall try to cut the truth out of her. Come, mammy," and she led the trembling old negress up to her room. When hidden from all eyes her courage and excitement gave way, and she cried on her mammy's breast like the child she was.

CHAPTER X

A BAFFLED DIPLOMATIST

MISS LOU left consternation, confusion and deep anxiety below stairs. Mad Whately had his own code of ethics, and he felt as if he had committed the unpardonable sin. His mother was shocked and pained beyond measure. She understood the feelings of her son, and sympathized with him. Drawing him into the parlor, she soothed and cheered him with the assurance that when his cousin's anger passed she would explain and intercede.

"Oh, mother!" he exclaimed, "I did love her honestly before, but now I adore her. I must marry her, and by a lifetime of devotion wipe out the wrong I did not intend to inflict."

"It will all come about right yet, my boy," she whispered. "I never understood Louise before. I fear they have been too strict and unsympathetic in her bringing up, and so she has naturally rebelled against all their plans. You didn't think at the time—indeed, in our excitement we all forgot—that Aun' Jinkey was her mammy, and you know how strong that tie is, even in your case, and you have always had a mother's love."

"Oh, fool, fool that I was in my mad anger! Brave, grand, heroic girl! I'd have done as much for my old mammy; or rather I'd have struck down a general before he should harm her. Oh, mother, mother!" concluded the much-indulged youth, "I must marry her. She is just the bride for a soldier."

"Rather than have her fall into the hands of the enemy,

we will lead her to see that it is the only thing to be done," replied Mrs. Whately.

Perkins had a consultation with Mr. Baron, as far as that desperately perturbed old gentleman was capable of holding one, the result of which was the decision to let the negroes alone, provided they kept quiet and obeyed. It was evident to both of them that the approach of Union forces, though yet comparatively distant, had produced the usual demoralizing effects. The government at The Oaks had not been harsh, but it had been strict and animated by a spirit which alienated sympathy. The situation was now seen to be too critical to admit of severity, all the more as the protection of Whately and his troopers might soon be withdrawn.

It was a silent and depressing meal to which they sat down that evening, long after the accustomed hour, a fact which Mr. Baron would not forget, even in the throes of an earthquake. He groaned over it; he groaned over everything, and especially over his niece, who had suddenly developed into the most unmanageable element in the whole vexed problem of the future. He felt that they owed her very much, and that she held the balance of power through her influence over the negroes; and yet he was incensed that she was not meek and submissive as a young woman should be under all circumstances. An angry spot burned in each of Mrs. Baron's cheeks, for she felt that Miss Lou's conduct reflected very unfavorably on her bringing up. She was so scandalized and vexed that she could scarcely think of anything else. Mrs. Whately was all deprecation and apology, trying to pour oil on the troubled waters in every way, while her son was as savagely angry at himself as he had been at poor Aun' Jinkey and her grandson.

Most fortunately the main feature in the case remained undiscovered. The fact that a Union scout had been hidden and permitted to depart would have been another bombshell, and the consequences of its explosion would have

been equally hard to predict or circumscribe. As it was, Miss Lou and Aun' Jinkey received a certain remorseful sympathy which they would have forfeited utterly had the truth been revealed. And the secret did tremble on the lips of Zany. She was not only greatly aggrieved that Chunk had "runned away" after all, without her, and had become a sort of hero among his own kind on the plantation, but she also felt keenly her own enforced insignificance when she knew so much more than that Chunk had merely decamped. Her mistress little dreamed, as the girl waited stolidly and sullenly on the table, that she was so swelling with her secret as to be like a powder magazine. But fear rather than faith finally sealed Zany's lips. She was aware that the first question asked would be, "If you knew so much, why didn't *you* tell?" and she could give no reason which would save her from condign punishment. Moreover, she hoped that Chunk would soon return with no end of "Linkum men," and then her silence would be rewarded.

Supper was sent up to Miss Lou and her guest, and the old woman, having at last some sense of security, made her first good meal since "things began to happen." Then she hankered after her pipe. "I'll get it for you," said the warm-hearted girl. She stole to the head of the landing, and, the hall below being clear at the moment, she flitted down and out at the back door, reaching the deserted cabin unobserved. How desolate it looked in the fading twilight! The fire was out on the hearth, and the old creaking chair was empty. But Miss Lou did not think of Aun' Jinkey. Her thoughts were rather of a stranger whose face had been eloquent of gratitude as he offered to shield her with his life. Then she remembered his excited question as to the time of the marriage. "When?" Had her answer anything to do with the sudden and bold departure? Her heart was in a sudden flutter. She snatched the corncob pipe and tobacco pouch, and sped back again in a strange blending of fear and hope. She felt guilty that she could dare hope to see him, a *Yankee*, again. "But his smile was so pleasant

and frank!" she murmured. "Oh, I never remember to have had such genial, honest, unreserved good-will looked at me by any one except mammy, and she's so old and wrinkled that she can't look much of anything. What handsome, kind, dark eyes he had! Yet they would all say, 'He's a monster!' "

She made her way back in safety until she reached the head of the stairs, and then came plump upon her aunt. "Where have you been?" asked Mrs. Baron, sharply.

"After Aun' Jinkey's pipe."

"Horrible! I forbid her smoking in this house."

"I shall permit her to smoke in my room."

"You have no right."

"Very well; then I'll go with her to her cabin."

"My dear sister," said Mrs. Whately, putting her hand on the irate lady's arm, "I think it will be better to let our niece have her way in such little things. We must remember that she is no longer a child."

"I think she is acting like a very perverse and foolish one; but then rather than have any more scenes"—and looking unutterable things she passed on down the stairs.

"My dear, I wish to see you by and by. Won't you let me?" said Mrs. Whately.

"I wish to see you—I must see you before I sleep," replied the girl, decisively.

"I'll come up soon, then, dear."

Mrs. Baron reported to her husband what had occurred, but he only groaned. He was scarcely able to do much else now.

"Oh, hang it!" exclaimed Whately, "what fiend directs my luck this evening? If I had only known she had gone to the cabin, I could have compelled her to listen to me and to my apologies."

"No worse luck could have happened," said his mother, entering. "You must curb your impatience, and so—pardon me for saying it—must you, brother and sister. You are driving the girl to lengths she would never have thought

of going. She is excited and almost beside herself. You forget, brother, that she is a Southern girl and a Baron, and has all the spirit of our race. She is one to be coaxed, to yield to gentle pressure and firm reasoning, and not to be driven."

"Oh, curse it! we've made a mess of it, I fear," groaned Whately, who was capable of violent alternations of mood, and now was in the valley of humiliation and almost despair.

"Well, you must all let me manage a little now," resumed Mrs. Whately, somewhat complacently, "or else there is no telling what trouble you may have."

"Yes, yes," cried her son, "I insist on mother's managing. She has always obtained what I wanted, and I shall certainly throw my life away if I don't marry Cousin Lou."

"Madison," said his mother, tearfully, "am I, who have so loaded you with kindness, of no account?"

"Oh, forgive me, mother, I can't do anything but blunder to-night. I'm all broken up, distracted by conflicting duties and feelings. I picked up important information this evening. The Yankee column, halting in the rich valley to the northwest, have been ranging the country far and near, loading their wagons and resting their horses. They will make a move soon, and will come this way just as likely as not. Our forces are coming up from the South, and there certainly will be a fight soon somewhere in this region. I received a secret despatch at the court-house, after seeing the minister, who will be here early to-morrow evening. After the wedding I intend to escort mother and my wife south to Cousin Sam Whately's. They certainly will be out of the Yankee line of march there. Perhaps you and aunt had better go too."

"No," said Mr. Baron. "I intend to stay and face it out here. I shall stand or fall on my own hearth."

"And I shall remain with my husband," added Mrs. Baron, firmly.

"Well, nothing worse may happen than a general sack of the place, but I cannot leave mother and the girl who is

to be my wife. I shall ride over to our place in the morning for the best horse on it, and to see the overseer. I'll bring back a few papers which I will put in your charge, uncle."

Thus they discussed the emergency till Mrs. Whately thought she could venture to Miss Lou's room. Her son accompanied her to the door and called out, "I give you my word, cousin, that Aun' Jinkey can go to her cabin, and that no one shall disturb her"; then he retreated to the parlor again.

When Mrs. Whately entered the room, she witnessed what was not reassuring. Miss Lou's white shoulder was bare, and upon it was the long red mark of the whip. Aun' Jinkey was bathing the bruise with some lotion. "My poor child!" said the lady, "Madison is almost beside himself with grief and self-reproach."

"Please tell him," replied the girl, "that I'm glad the blow fell on me instead of mammy."

"Ah, well, my dear, he has asked forgiveness and is profoundly sorry."

"Hit soon be well, honey. Wish ter grashus hit wuz me dat hab it! en you barin' hit so patient, too, w'en I smokin'. Dar, I kiver hit up now, en hit ain' dar in de mawnin'. I reck'n I go back ter de cabin now, honey. I kin'er used ter my own chimbly corner. Miss Whately got sump'n ter say ter comfort you."

"Very well, mammy. I'll see that you have no trouble," and the old woman departed.

"Surely, Louise, you cannot expect any more trouble, after my son has said there would not be any," said Mrs. Whately, in a somewhat aggrieved tone.

"You must have seen," was the reply, "that Cousin Madison hasn't just the kind of self-control which inspires confidence."

"I assure you, Louise, that he regrets his act as much as you can. You should, in charity, remember his great provocation."

"Well, then," Miss Lou burst out, "let him make amends. Here I am, a defenceless girl, with all my kindred against me. He should be the first to defend me."

"So he wishes to do, my dear; and he only craves the most sacred right to defend you."

"Yes, in his own way, and without any regard to my feelings and wishes."

"Indeed, my dear, you misjudge him. You have only to yield one point in order to make him a slave to your wishes."

"But that is yielding everything. Oh, aunt, how can you urge a girl toward a loveless marriage?"

"Now, my dear, just listen patiently to me for a few moments," began Mrs. Whately in a wheedling tone. "I am older than you are. I know young girls are apt to have romantic notions, but when they reach my age they find that it is ever best to act in view of good and sufficient reasons. Apart from the terrible emergency that is upon us, you know that we all have had our hearts set on this marriage almost ever since you were born, and we have made no secret of the fact. It would be a terrible disappointment to us if it should not take place. I fear that life has been too strict and narrow for you here, but you know that in my home you will dwell in an atmosphere of kindness and indulgence. I will give up to you whenever you are ready to take the reins after these sore troubles are over. But, Louise, you do not realize that we are in the midst of a terrible emergency. You ought not to remain here. Madison has arranged that we both go south to his cousin Sam's."

"I don't wish to go!" cried the girl, wringing her hands.

"Now, my dear, can't you just believe that we, who are more experienced and know the danger, wish to do what is best for you and what you will soon see was best?"

"No, I cannot! I cannot! I just feel that I can't marry my cousin without perjuring myself."

"Surely you don't love any one else, Louise?"

"What chance have I had to love any one, except my old mammy? I don't know anything about the love which I feel should lead to marriage. I have just been treated like a child, and then without any girlhood at all I'm to be married to one that I shrink from. I feel in my very soul that it's all wrong and unjust."

"But, my dear, you won't feel so after you are a wife and safe in your own home. You will then feel that you have reached woman's true place and sphere, without incurring the risks and misfortunes which befall so many. Your guardians might have shown more tact, perhaps, but they meant well, and they wish you well, and are seeking only your welfare. They feel in honor bound to do what is best for you, and not what, in your inexperience, you may wish at the moment. As for my son, a warmer-hearted fellow does not breathe. He loves you fondly. You can influence him, you can control him as no other can, you have the strongest hold upon him."

"Alas!" said the girl, divining the ultimate truth, "you love him blindly and wholly; you would sacrifice me, yourself and everything to him, and because he has always had everything his own way, he would have me in spite of the whole protest of my being. No one truly cares for me; no one understands me. I have been thrown back upon books and my own nature for such knowledge as I now so desperately need, and I feel that if I am false to my interests, to what I believe is right, my life is spoiled. I don't wish to marry any one, and as to all these dangers you so vaguely threaten, I believe that if there is a good God, he will take care of me."

"Well, my dear," said Mrs. Whately, striving to hide the fact that she was baffled, "we won't talk any more about it to-night. You are excited and worried, and incapable of wise judgment. Rest and sleep are what you need now," and she kissed the girl, who did not return the caress.

"Wise judgment!" she muttered, bitterly, "what fine words they use! So you, too, are hopelessly against me.

You would give me to your son just as you used to give him everything he cried for when a child. Well, then, I'll appeal to the minister himself. I don't believe he can marry me against my will. At any rate, I shall never give my consent, never; and perhaps somebody may come in time. My people are teaching me to fear them even more than the Yankees."

CHAPTER XI

AUN' JINKEY'S WARNING

THE night passed like a lull in the storm. Perkins reported that the negroes were quiet, contenting themselves with whispering and watchfulness. Aun' Jinkey smoked and dozed in her chair, listening to every sound, but no "squinch-owl" renewed her fears. The family at the mansion were too perturbed to sleep much, for all knew that the morrow must bring decisive events. The three soldiers sent after the recreant trooper returned from a bootless chase and were allowed to rest, but Whately saw to it that there was a vigilant watch kept by relief of guards on the part of the others. He was not very greatly encouraged by his mother's report, but as the hours passed the habits of his life and the tendencies of his nature asserted themselves with increasing force. He would marry his cousin on the morrow; he would not be balked in his dearest hope and wish. The very resistance of the girl stimulated his purpose, for throughout all his life nothing so enhanced his desire for anything as difficulty and denial. The subduing the girl's high spirit into subservience to his own was in itself a peculiarly alluring prospect, and he proved how little he appreciated her character by whiling away part of the night over "Taming of the Shrew." A creature of fitful impulse, nurtured into an arrogant sense of superiority, he banished all compunctions, persuading himself easily into the belief that as soldier, officer, and lover he was taking the manly course in going straight forward. "The idea of consulting a whimsical girl at such a

time," he muttered, "when a Yankee horde may descend on the plantation within forty-eight hours."

Miss Lou was quite as sleepless as himself, and also did a great deal of thinking. She had too much pride to hide and mope in her room. Her high, restless spirit craved action, and she determined to brave whatever happened with the dignity of courage. She would face them all and assert what she believed to be her rights before them all, even the clergyman himself. She therefore appeared at the breakfast table with just enough color in her cheeks and fire in her eyes to enhance her beauty.

"Ah, this is something like," exclaimed her uncle. "I knew sleep and thought would bring back good sense."

Mrs. Whately kissed her effusively and Mrs. Baron formally, the girl submitting with like mien in both instances. Her cousin, in accordance with his mood and the policy he had adopted, bowed gallantly and with a touch of grandiloquence in his tone said, "I again apologize before all for my most unfortunate act last evening."

She only bowed silently in reply.

Then Whately assumed the air of one who had many and weighty matters on his mind, his whole conversation conforming to the accepted belief that they were facing a terrible emergency, and that he, as the practical head of the family at such a time, must act decisively for the best good and safety of all. "If I could be governed in this instance," he said, "only by patriotic feeling I would advise the destruction of all the forage on the place if convinced that the Yanks were coming this way, but that would incite them to every possible outrage. Still, I truly believe that it would be best for you and aunt to go with us this evening."

"No," said Mr. Baron, "I've settled that."

"Haven't you negroes that you can trust to take the stock off into the woods for concealment?"

"After Chunk's rascality I won't trust any of them."

"Well, I shall adopt that plan at our place this morning, and leave as little of value within reach as I can help."

By a sort of tacit agreement it was thought best not to say anything to Miss Lou except as Mrs. Whately broached the subject, it being believed that a quiet ignoring of her will and a manifest purpose to carry out their own would have the most weight in breaking down her opposition. Indeed it was a shrewd policy, hard for the young girl to bear up against. Mrs. Baron had been enjoined not to cross her in little things. The busy housekeeper was too preoccupied to do so had she been disposed, but it troubled and incensed the girl to the last degree to see her bustling about, preparing for the wedding as if it would take place as a matter of course. Mrs. Whately's affectionate smiles and encouraging words were even harder to endure. That good lady acted as if Miss Lou were a timid and coy maiden, who merely needed heartening and reassuring in order to face a brief ordeal, and then all would be well. Her cousin gallantly lifted her hand to his lips and then rode away with part of his men, saying cheerfully, "I'll manage everything for the best."

A vague terror seized upon the girl and she again sought the refuge of Aun' Jinkey's cabin. She must have some one to speak to who understood her, who felt for her. She found that Mrs. Baron had been there before her, urging the completion of certain tasks. Indeed, the old woman was ironing a white muslin dress which looked very bridal-like. Miss Lou recognized it as her own gown, which might naturally be worn on such an occasion.

"Who brought that here?" she asked quickly.

"Ole miss, honey. She said you cud war dis or de one you hab on, des ez you pleases."

"Aun' Jinkey," said the girl in an awed whisper, "do you think they can marry me against my will?"

"Miss Lou, I declar ter you I'se been smokin' en projeckin' ober dat mos' all night."

"Well?"

"Hit 'pears ter me a orfully mux-up question. Yere yo' gyardins, ole mars'r en ole miss. Dey's des had dere

say on dis plantashon sence I wuz a gyurl. You wuz trus' ter dem ter be took keer on en you tole me how he manage yo' prop'ty. He call you he ward. I des dunno w'at po'r dat ward business gib 'im. I'se yeared en my day ob young gyurls mar'ed yere en mar'ed dar en dey ain' sayin' much 'bout who dey mar'y. Folks say dat wuz de way wid ole miss. I reckermember dem days en I year ole mars'r's fader talk'n wid her fader 'bout w'at dey call set'l'ments en po'tions. Den ole miss's mammy tole me how her young miss wuz cool ez a cowcumber, en how she say her folks know bes' en she sat'sfied; en den how she gib her min' ter w'at she call her trosso. Why honey, I des doin' up tings ob dat ar trosso yit."

"That's just the trouble with aunt," said Miss Lou scornfully. "I don't believe she ever had heart enough to love with."

"Well, I reck'n ole mars'r is projeckin' dis away. Ole miss, she settle down en tuck hole strong. She des kin'er fall inter he ways en mek tings hum wid de yard en house folks. She des a nachel-bawn housekeeper, en we uns all had ter stan 'roun' en do ez she sed sud'n, we sutn'y did; en ole mars'r, he tink hit be des de same wid you."

"But it won't, mammy. I'm not like my aunt."

"Dat you ain', honey, bless de Lawd! Ole miss neber stan' 'twix me en a whip, en she neber run fer my pipe en let her shol'er ache whiles I smokes like a ole himage. I'se only des a s'plainin' how dey feels 'bout yo' mar'age."

"Ah, but mammy, you know how I feel about it. I won't marry my cousin if I can help it."

"Hit's yo' feelin's, honey, w'at des riles up my in'erds so I kyant hardly wuk. Dat's whar my projeckin' gins out, en I'se kin'er stump'd 'bout hit. Dey's gwine right 'long wid dere prep'rations des ez ef dey cud do ez dey pleased. Dunno w'at de law is 'bout hit ef dere is any law in dese mux-up times. I'se des took clar off my foots wid all de goin's on. De fiel'-han's at de quarters is bilin' ober wid 'citement, en dey's sayin' de Linkum men's comin' ter

upset ebryting. Whar dey get de news fum I dunno. Dey sez ole mars'r is 'stracted en ole miss des put her thin lips tergedder ez ef she gwine ter hab her way ter de las' minit. Ez fer Marse Whately, you knows he al'ays hab his way, en ef dere isn't eny way he mek it. You sez de min'ster en folks is comin'? Hit des stumps me fer dem ter go on so ef dey hasn't de po'r."

"Well, then," said the girl desperately, "they will have to use force all the way through. I'll never give my consent."

"P'raps w'en de min'ster see dat he woan mar'y you."

"That's just my hope," said the girl, "I—"

A quick step was heard and a moment later Mrs. Baron entered the cabin. Ostensibly she came for some of the articles which Aun' Jinkey had ironed, but Miss Lou knew she was under surveillance and she departed without a word. On entering her room she found that her little trunk had been packed and locked in her absence and that the key was gone. She felt that it was but another indignity, another phase of the strong quiet pressure urging her toward the event she so dreaded. A hunted, half-desperate look came into her eyes, but she did not waver in her purpose.

Mrs. Whately knocked, but the girl would not admit her.

Meanwhile Mrs. Baron said to Aun' Jinkey in parting, "See to it that you don't put foolish notions in my niece's head. We are none of us in a mood for trifling to-day."

Then the old woman's wrath burst out. "You 'speck I'se feared ter speak fer dat chile w'at stan' by me so? Bettah be keerful yosef, mistis; you alls gittin' on ve'y scarey groun' wid Miss Lou. You tink you kin do wid her w'at you pleases des ez ef she a lil gyurl baby. I reck'n her moder come out'n her grabe ter look arter you ef you ain' keerful."

"What do you mean by such language?"

"I mean des dis, mistis. Ef you tinks Miss Lou ole anuff ter mar'y you know she ain' a chile. Ef she ain' a

chile she a woman. Does you tink you kin tromple on a woman? You kin tromple on me en I ain' sayin' not'n, but you kyant tromple on a wi'te woman like yosef. I tells you you gittin' on scarey groun' wid Miss Lou."

"If you both had sense you would know we are getting her off scarey ground, as you call it. All you have to do is to obey my orders and not meddle."

"Ve'y well, mistis, I'se warn you," said Aun' Jinkey, sullenly returning to her work.

"Warn me of what?" But the old woman would not vouchsafe another word.

Mrs. Baron returned to the house, her lips compressed with a firmer purpose to maintain discipline on deck till the ship went down, if that was to be the end. Combined with her cold, unimaginative temperament was a stronger and more resolute spirit than that of her husband, who now was chiefly governed by his lifelong habit of persistence. He adhered to his purposes as a man at sea clings to the ship which he feels is going to pieces beneath him.

Chunk and Scoville reached the Union camp in the gray dawn of the morning, and the latter soon had an audience with the commanding officer, with whom he was a favorite scout. The small party which had been compelled to leave Scoville behind had brought important information, gained chiefly by the young man's daring and address, and the general was very glad to see him again and to be assured of his escape.

"We are ready to move," said the commander, "and the information brought in by your party has decided me to bear off to the southeast in order to meet the enemy approaching from the southwest. As soon as you are rested, Lieutenant Scoville—"

"Sir! what?"

"Yes, I had recommended you for promotion and the order has come."

"If zeal in your service, sir"—began the scout flushing proudly.

"Yes, yes, I understand all that. I remember the men who serve me well. As soon as you're able to start out in the same direction again I would like you to do so."

"I'm able now," said Scoville eagerly, and then he briefly related the situation of affairs at The Oaks, concluding, "If I had twenty-five men I believe I could not only prevent the marriage but capture all the Confederates with their information. They have been scouting up toward us just as we were toward the enemy."

"All right," said the general, laughing. "Perhaps the marriage may come off yet, only with another groom."

"No, sir," said Scoville, gravely. "The girl befriended me in my sore need. She is as good and innocent as a child, and I would shield and respect her as I would my own sister."

"That's the right spirit, Lieutenant. I was not sure how far matters had gone—in fact, was only jesting."

Scoville made a hearty breakfast, and within an hour, at the head of over a score of men, was rapidly retracing his steps, Chunk following in a state of wild elation. They both had been furnished with fresh horses, and the tough, elastic sinews of the newly-fledged officer were tense with an unwonted excitement. If those tearful blue eyes of Miss Lou should welcome him as deliverer this would be the most memorable day of his life.

CHAPTER XII

A WHIRLWIND OF EVENTS

WHATELY returned wearing a rather gloomy and angry aspect. He had threatened his negroes and stormed at them; they had listened in sullen silence. The overseer had said, "Hit's the old story. They have heard that the Yanks are near and may come this way. Fact is, one doesn't know what they haven't heard. They hold together and keep mum. You can see that all discipline is at an end among 'em."

Whately could only give the man such directions as the emergency dictated, obtain some valuables, and return chafed and all the more bent upon securing out of the possible wreck the one object he most coveted. But Miss Lou puzzled him and perplexed them all. She had taken refuge in almost absolute silence, and was as unresponsive to Mrs. Whately's endearments as to her uncle and aunt's expostulations, while toward Whately she was positively freezing in her coldness. Troubled and inwardly enraged, he was yet more than ever determined to carry out his purpose. His orders to his men were given sharply and sternly, and his mood was so fierce that there was no longer any affectation or assumption on his part. The girl's heart fluttered with nameless fears, but she had the strength of will to maintain the cold, impassive demeanor she had resolved upon. She felt that it would be useless to make further effort to influence her kindred, and that if she revealed her purpose to appeal to the clergyman, they might so prejudice his mind against her that he would not

listen favorably. Fearing that this might be the case anyway, she found her thoughts turning with increasing frequency to the possible intervention of the Union scout. She both hoped for and feared his coming, supported as he would be, in this instance, by followers who might be so different from himself. She could not free her mind from the influence of the stories about Northern soldiers, and yet she was sure that as far as his power went, they would all be protected. Indeed, one danger menaced so closely and threateningly she could scarcely think of anything else than escape and relief from it.

As the sun began to sink in the west her uncle came to her door and said authoritatively, "Louise, I wish you to come down."

She obeyed without a word and entered the parlor where all were assembled, noting with dismay that the Rev. Dr. Williams was already present. Her cousin sought to meet her gallantly, but she evaded him and took a seat. Mr. Baron began a sort of harangue. "Louise," he said, "as your guardian and in obedience to my sense of duty in a great responsibility, I have approved of this marriage. I am convinced that the time will speedily come when you will be glad that I—that we all—were firm at this time. Both I and your aunt are growing old. Troubles, sore indeed even for the young to endure, are upon us. I am not sure that a roof will cover our gray hairs much longer. Perhaps in the dead of this very night the ruthless enemy may come. Now, your aunt Whately's carriage is at the door. A gallant soldier and a Confederate officer, the choice of all your kindred, is eager to give you his name and loving protection. He will take you far away from war's rude alarms, with its attendant and horrible perils. We have no common foe to deal with, but monsters animated by unquenchable hatred and a diabolical spirit. I should betray my trust and be recreant to my duty did I not avail myself of the one avenue of safety still open to you. See, your cousin's brave men are mounted, armed, and

ready to act as your escort. Dr. Williams is here to perform his good offices, although other invited friends have not ventured from home in this time of peril which recent tidings prove to be increasing every hour. In a few moments you will be an honored wife, on your way to a place of refuge, instead of a helpless girl whose defenders may soon be scattered or dead."

"Truly, Miss Baron," said the clergyman, rising and approaching, "you cannot hesitate in circumstances like these."

Miss Lou felt her tongue clinging to the roof of her mouth, and could only say in a hoarse whisper, "But I do not love my cousin—I do not wish to marry."

"That may be your feeling at this moment. Indeed, circumstances are not conducive to gentle amatory feelings, and all may seem sudden and hasty to you, but you must consider that your relatives in this emergency—indeed that all your neighbors—are doing many things and taking many precautions that would not be thought of in a time of security. I have already sent my own family further South, and now in your case and Mrs. Whately's I feel that time is pressing. Will you please rise and take your cousin by the hand?"

She shook her head and remained motionless. Whately advanced decisively, took her hand, and sought gently to draw her into position before the clergyman. His touch broke the spell, the paralysis of dread, and she burst out, "No, no, you cannot marry me when my whole soul protests. I will not be married!"

"Louise, I command you," began Mr. Baron excitedly.

"It makes no difference. I will not! I will not!" was the passionate and almost despairing response.

"Oh, come, cousin, you are just excited, frightened, and off your balance," said Whately soothingly.

"My dear Miss Baron," added the clergyman, "let me reassure you. It is evident that you are a little nervous and hysterical. Pray be calm and trust your relatives to

do what is best for you. I do not wonder that your nerves have given way and that—"

"My nerves have not given way. Unfriended child that I am, I must not lose self-control. God grant that my *will* does not give way."

"Unfriended!" exclaimed Mrs. Whately reproachfully. "Few girls in these times have so many to care and think for them. We are all bent on securing your welfare at every cost."

"Yes, at every cost to me."

"Dr. Williams sees the wisdom and reasonableness of our course. My son is even straining his sense of military duty to escort us to a place of safety, where you will still be among relatives."

"Then let him escort me as his cousin, not his wife," cried the girl.

"But, Miss Baron, in the turmoil and confusion which may ensue you will be far safer as his wife," Dr. Williams urged. "I would have been glad if I could have given my daughter like protection. Truly, it is not wise to be swayed by mere nervous excitement at such a time."

"Oh, even you, from whom I hoped so much, are against me!"

"No, my dear child," replied the minister, earnestly and sincerely, "I am for you always, but I cannot help seeing, with your relatives, that at present you are not in the quiet state of mind which would enable you to act wisely for yourself. What earthly motive could I have except your safety, welfare and happiness?"

"Well, then," said the girl, with a swift glance around and as if turning into stone, "do your worst. I will never give my consent, *never!*"

They looked at each other perplexedly and inquiringly, as if to ask what should be done, when Perkins burst in at the back door of the hallway shouting, "The Yanks!"

The girl sank into a chair and covered her burning face for an instant. Deep in her soul she divined who her res-

cuer was, yet in the midst of her hope she felt a certain consciousness of guilt and fear. Mr. Baron, Dr. Williams, and the ladies, half-paralyzed, yet drawn by a dreadful fascination, approached the open windows. Mad Whately now played a better part. He was in full uniform and his horse stood saddled without. He went to it, mounted with almost the swiftness of light, and was just in time to see the Federals sweep around the drive which led to the stables. Scoville had brought his little force by the familiar way of Aun' Jinkey's cabin. Furious at being forestalled, and in obedience to a headlong courage which none disputed, Whately's sabre flashed instantly in the rays of the sinking sun, and his command, "Charge!" rang clear, without a second's hesitancy.

The order echoed in the girl's heart and she felt that she had too much at stake not to witness the conflict. Her own high spirit also prompted the act, and in a moment she was out on the veranda. She saw her cousin spur directly toward the leader of the Federals, in whom she recognized the Union scout. His men came galloping after him, but seemed more inclined to envelop and surround the Confederates than to engage in hand-to-hand conflicts. The latter were experienced veterans and quickly recognized that they were being overpowered and that there was no use in throwing away their lives. Hasty shots were fired, a few sabres clashed, but the demand, "Surrender!" heard on all sides, was so well enforced by the aspect of the situation that compliance soon began. Scoville and Whately, with those immediately about them, maintained the conflict. The two young officers were evenly matched as swordsmen, although the Federal was the larger, stronger, and cooler man. As a result, their duel was quickly terminated by the loss of Whately's sabre, wrenched from his hand. Then the point of his foe's weapon threatened his throat, and the word "Surrender!" was thundered in his ears.

Instead of complying, he fell from his horse as if shot, lay still an instant, and then in the confusion of the mêlée

glided through an adjacent basement door and disappeared. Seeing him fall, his mother uttered a wild shriek and gave way to almost hysterical grief. A backward glance revealed to Whately that the fight was lost, or rather that it had been hopeless from the first, and his one thought now was to escape and lead back a larger force for the purposes of both rescue and vengeance. Gaining a rear door, a bound took him to some shrubbery. A second later he was behind the kitchen. Aun' Suke saw him, threw up her hands, and uttered an inarticulate cry. A moment or two more and he was in the stable, leading out a horse. All attention was now so concentrated in front of the mansion that he was not observed. He took only time to slip on a bridle, then springing on the animal's bare back, he struck into a field behind a clump of trees. Putting the horse to a run, he was soon beyond successful pursuit. Some of his own men had seen him fall before they were driven back, and believed that he was either wounded or dead; thronging Federals, unaware of the circumstances, occupied the ground, and only Miss Lou, with an immense burden lifted from her heart, saw his ruse and flight. She wished him well sincerely if he would only leave her to herself. Hastening to Mrs. Whately she speedily restored the lady with assurances of her son's escape, then with her joined the group on the veranda. Mr. Baron, in the crisis of his affairs and as the head of the family, maintained a dignity and composure which of late had been lacking.

Scoville paid no heed to them until every vestige of resistance had ceased and the Confederates were disarmed and collected as prisoners. Then sitting on his horse in front of the piazza steps he rapidly gave his orders. His first act was to send a vedette down the avenue toward the main road; then he selected five men, saying, "Take charge of the stables, barn, and out-buildings. Keep them as they are and permit no one to approach without my written orders."

At this moment the field-hands, who had been surging

nearer and nearer, sent forward a sort of improvised deputation. They approached bowing, with hats in hand and wistful looks in their eyes. Were these in truth the messengers of freedom of whom they had heard so much? Mr. Baron almost gnashed his teeth as he witnessed this action on the part of his property.

"Mars'r," said the spokesman, "I reck'n you got good news for we uns."

"Yes, good news. You are all free." His words rang out so that they were heard by every one. Shouts and cries of exultation followed like an echo, and ragged hats were tossed high in joy.

The young soldier raised his hand with a warning and repressive gesture. In the silence that ensued he added, "My men here are both free and white, yet they must obey orders. So must you. Go back to your quarters and prove yourselves worthy of freedom by quiet behavior and honesty. If I find any one, black or white, acting the part of a thief while I am in charge it will go hard with him. The general will be here to-morrow and he will advise you further."

His words found immediate acceptance, the negroes returning to the quarters, laughing and chatting joyously, not a few wiping tears of deep emotion from their eyes. The long-expected day had come. They little knew what the future had in store for them, but this was the beginning of a new era and the fulfilment of a great hope.

Scoville now dismounted and gave the reins to Chunk, who stood near with a droll assumption of soldier-like stiffness and oblivion to all the well-known faces. Mounting the steps, cap in hand, the young officer approached Mr. Baron, who was becoming a little assured that the orders thus far heard had not included a general application of the torch.

"Mr. Baron, I presume?" said Scoville.

"Yes, sir," was the stiff reply.

"The ladies of your household, I suppose?"

"They are."

Scoville bowed ceremoniously to each, giving Miss Lou no other sign of recognition than a humorous twinkle in his eye. "Ladies," he began, "since it is the fortune of war that I must have command here for a brief time, I hasten to assure you that we shall give as little annoyance as possible. A few men on both sides were wounded, and I fear that the officer commanding your men was killed. At least I saw him fall. The night is warm and still and I can make a hospital here on the piazza with a little aid from you. Please dismiss all further fears. Unless we are attacked, the night shall pass quietly. Each and every one will be treated with respect and courtesy. I must request of you, however, sir," addressing Mr. Baron, "food for myself and men and forage for our horses."

"I suppose you will take them anyway," growled the unwilling host.

"Certainly," replied Scoville, giving him a steady look. "Do you expect us to go hungry? I shall do my duty as a soldier and an officer, as well as deport myself as a gentleman."

There was nothing left but for Mr. Baron to give his directions to Perkins, or for the ladies to make preparations for the improvised hospital. Miss Lou gratefully recognized that Scoville did not intend to compromise her in the least nor reveal his previous acquaintance unless it should become known through no fault of his. She lingered a moment as Dr. Williams stepped forward and asked, "May I be permitted to return to my home?"

"I trust so, certainly, sir, but my duty requires brief explanation on your part and pledges that you will take no hostile action. We are not among friends, you know."

"I can very readily account for myself, sir," was the stiff response. "I was summoned here to perform a wedding ceremony which your most inopportune arrival prevented. I am a man of peace, not of war, yet I cannot and will not give any pledges."

"It is scarcely fair then, sir, for you to take refuge in your calling, but I will waive that point. I must warn you, however, that we can give protection to those only who do not seek to harm us. You are at liberty. Good-evening, sir."

He had extracted from the clergyman the fact that he had arrived in time, and he again gave the girl in the doorway a mirthful glance, then turned on his heel to attend to his military duties.

Miss Lou hastened to her room with hot cheeks.

CHAPTER XIII

THE UNEXPECTED HAPPENS

SCOVILLE soon learned that his opponent, so far from being killed or even wounded, had escaped. He was not much worried by this fact, believing that before the Confederate officer could reach his friends and bring back an attacking force, the Federal column would be on the ground. Indeed, he was glad that the family upon which he had quartered himself could not associate him with so terrible a calamity. The young girl might not wish to marry her cousin, yet be sorry if he were fatally or even seriously wounded, while the rest of the household would be plunged in the deepest distress. Although a resolute soldier, Scoville was a kind-hearted fellow, and disposed to take the most genial views of life that circumstances permitted. There was a humor about his present situation which he relished exceedingly. He was buoyant over the interrupted wedding, and bent upon disappointing Mr. Baron in all his grewsome expectations in regard to the Yankees. There should be discipline, order, quiet, and an utter absence of all high-tragedy. He cautioned his men against the slightest tendency to excess, even forbidding the chaffing of the negroes and noisiness. A steer, a pig, and some fowls were killed for supper, and the wood for cooking it was taken from an ample pile in the rear of the house. Happily, none were seriously wounded, and being veterans were able to do much for one another, while an elderly man in the troop who had some rude surgical experience, supplemented their efforts. Miss Lou speedily

joined her aunts in rummaging for old linen for bandages, and the performance of human duty by the elderly ladies dulled the edge of the terrible truth that they were in the hands of the Yankees. True, they had to admit to themselves that the young soldier did not appear like a "ruthless monster" and that his conduct thus far had been almost ceremoniously polite; yet all this might be but a blind on the part of a cunning and unscrupulous foe.

When they came down to the veranda with the materials required, the unscrupulous foe met them, cap in hand, thanked them courteously, and gave his entire attention to the wounded, treating the men of both sides alike. Mrs. Whately, in glad reaction from overwhelming fear concerning her son's safety, offered her services in behalf of the few wounded Confederates and they were readily accepted. Before she was aware of it she found herself conferring with the young officer and the surgical trooper in regard to the best treatment of the injuries. Having long been mistress of a plantation and accustomed to act promptly when any of her slaves were hurt, she now proved a valuable auxiliary. When the soldiers with whom she sympathized were attended to, her kindness of heart led her on to the Federals, who thanked her as gratefully as if they were not depraved Yankees.

Mr. and Mrs. Baron had retired to the parlor, where they sat in state, awaiting in gloomy fortitude the darker developments of what they deemed the supreme tragedy of their lives. Miss Lou was flitting in and out, getting lint and other articles required by Mrs. Whately. She found it no easy matter to maintain the solemnity of aspect which her guardians thought appropriate to the occasion, but was assisted in this effort by her genuine pity for the wounded. In her joyous relief at escape from a hated union her heart was light indeed. She had, moreover, no slight sense of humor, and was just bubbling over with mirth at the fact that although the Yankee monsters, from whom it was said she must be rescued at every cost, were masters of the situ-

ation, they were engaged in nothing more ruthless than feeding their horses, preparing supper, and caring for the wounded. The most delicious thing of all was that one of the chief prophets of evil, her Aunt Whately, was aiding in the last-named task. Her exultation was increased when she brought the last article required and Scoville said with his genial smile, so well remembered, "I think I can assure you now, Miss Baron, that all will do very well. We are deeply indebted to this lady (bowing to Mrs. Whately) whose services have been as skilful as humane."

Now one of the things on which Mrs. Whately most prided herself was the generally accepted belief that she was as good as a country physician in an emergency, and she could not refrain from a slight and gracious acknowledgment of Scoville's words. As they drew near to the door she said hesitatingly, "Perhaps, sir, I should make an acknowledgment of deep indebtedness to you. I saw your sabre raised and pointed at my son's throat. Could you not have killed him had you so wished?"

"Ah! this is Mrs. Whately. Believe me, madam, we are not so bloodthirsty as to wish to kill, or even to injure, except so far as the necessities of war require. If you witnessed the brief conflict you must have observed that my effort was to capture rather than to destroy your son's force."

"We all could not help seeing that," cried Miss Lou eagerly.

"I could not help seeing also, Miss Baron, that you exposed yourself to danger like a veteran, and I was anxious indeed lest a stray bullet might harm you. It was well you were not armed or we might have fared worse," and there was so much mirth in his dark eyes that she turned away to hide her conscious blushes.

"Well, sir," resumed Mrs. Whately with emotion, "it is not easy to bless our enemies in this cruel war of aggression, but I must express my gratitude to one who stayed his hand when my son's life was within his power."

"I trust, madam, he may live to care for you in your declining years, and to become a good loyal citizen."

"He is loyal, sir," replied Mrs. Whately with gentle dignity, "to the only authority he recognizes," and with a bow she retired.

Miss Lou lingered a moment and said earnestly, "I thank you. You are very considerate."

His face so lighted up that it was almost boyish in its expression of pleasure as he answered with the pride and confidence of one sure of sympathy, "This is a jolly day for me. I was made an officer this morning, and now, best of all, I am paying a little of my debt to you."

She put her finger on her lips and shook her head, but the smile she gave him over her shoulder was reassuring. He promptly started on a round among his men again to see that the prisoners were properly guarded, and that all was going as he wished.

"Louise," said Mrs. Baron, as the girl appeared in the parlor door, "it would be far more decorous if you would remain here with your uncle and myself."

Miss Lou took a seat in the darkest corner that she might be less open to observation while she calmed the tumult of her feelings. So much had happened that she must catch her breath and think what it all meant. Mr. Baron began gloomily, "Well, the dreaded hour which I hoped and prayed never to see has come. We are helpless and in the hands of our enemies. Only God knows what an hour will bring forth—"

"He has brought deliverance," cried Mrs. Whately, entering. "I questioned Aun' Suke, thinking that she might have seen Madison if he left the house. She did see him safe and sound. She also saw him get a horse and ride away."

"Ah, poor boy! how different was his departure from what he had every reason to hope and expect!" replied Mr. Baron. "I should think your heart would be remorseful, indeed, Louise, when you picture your cousin flying

from his kindred and home, alone and sad, tortured meanwhile by thoughts of the fate which has overtaken us."

"I'm sure, uncle, we are all sitting quietly in the parlor. That does not seem very dreadful."

"You little know, young woman, you little realize the cunning depravity—"

"There now, brother," interposed Mrs. Whately, "we must not think evil until we see more evidence of it, even in Yankees. I admit that I am most wonderfully and agreeably disappointed. The young officer in whose hands we are might have killed my son, but did not. I must at least be just to such a man."

"And you know he has been polite to us all, and told us to dismiss our fears," added Miss Lou demurely.

"It would almost seem, Louise, that you welcomed these invaders. I am too old and well informed not to know that this suave manner he affects is designed to lull us into a sense of false security."

At this moment a firm step was heard on the veranda, followed by a rap from the brass knocker. They knew it was Scoville, and Mr. Baron rose and advanced to the parlor entrance. He assumed the solemn aspect of one who now must face the exactions and wrongs which he had predicted, and his wife tremblingly followed, to perish at his side if need be. But the invader barely stepped within the hall and stood uncovered as he said politely, "Mr. Baron, I have now practically made my dispositions for the night. There is no reason why your domestic routine should not be resumed as usual. As I said before, I pledge you my word you shall not be disturbed unless we are attacked. Good-evening, sir. Good-evening, ladies," and he bowed and withdrew, leaving the old gentleman speechless in the utter reversal of all that he had declared would take place. No plundering, no insults, no violence. On the contrary, even his beloved routine might be resumed. He turned around to his wife and sister almost gasping, "Is this some deep-laid plot?"

"It certainly must be," echoed his wife.

Miss Lou turned away quickly and stuffed her handkerchief in her mouth to prevent laughing outright.

Her uncle caught her in the act and was instantly in a rage.

"Shame upon you!" he cried. "Enemies without and traitors within."

This charge touched the girl to the quick, and she replied with almost equal anger, "I'm no traitor. Where has your loyalty to me been to-day? Look at me, uncle, and fix the fact in your mind, once for all, that I am neither a child nor an idiot. God has given me a mind and a conscience as truly as to you, and I shall use them. This Northern officer says we are safe. I believe it and you will know it in the morning. Now I simply insist that you and aunt treat me with the respect due to my years and station. I've endured too much to-day to be patient under anything more. I meant no disrespect to you in laughing, but I cannot help being glad that instead of all sorts of horrible things happening we are treated with simple and even delicate politeness."

"Yes, brother," added Mrs. Whately, "as far as this man is concerned, you must revise your opinions. There is no deep-laid plot—nothing but what is apparent. I must also urge upon you and sister a change in your treatment of Louise. She will be far more ready to fulfil our hopes when led by affection."

"Well, well, that I should live to see this day!" groaned Mr. Baron. "My ward virtually says that she will do as she pleases. The slaves have been told that they are free and so can do as they please. Henceforth I suppose I am to speak to my niece with bated breath, and be at the beck and call of every Sambo on the place."

"You are not 'weltering in your own blood,' uncle, and the 'roof is not blazing over our heads,'" replied Miss Lou quietly. "You have merely been told that you could have supper when it pleased you and then sleep in peace and

safety. Aunt, I will thank you for the key of my trunk. I wish to put my things back in their places."

Mrs. Baron took it from her pocket without a word, and Miss Lou went to her room.

True to her nature, Mrs. Whately began to pour oil on the lacerated feelings of her brother and sister-in-law. "Louise is right," she said. "Things are so much better than we expected—than they might have been—that we should raise our hearts in thankfulness. Just think! If this Northern officer is what you fear, why would he have spared my son, whom he might have killed in fair battle? In his conduct toward the wounded he showed a good, kindly spirit. I can't deny it; and he has been as polite to us as one of our own officers could have been. Think how different it all might have been—my brave son desperately wounded or dead, and unscrupulous men sacking the house! I need not refer to darker fears. I must say that I feel like meeting courtesy with courtesy. Since this Yankee behaves like a generous foe I would like to prove that Southern rebels and slave-drivers, as we are called, can equal him in all the amenities of life which the situation permits."

"Oh, sister!" cried Mrs. Baron, "even a cup of tea would choke me if I drank it in his presence."

But Mr. Baron had lighted his pipe, and reason and Southern pride were asserting themselves under its soothing influence. At last he said, "Well, let us have supper anyway. It is already after the hour."

"Supper has been ready this long time, as you know," replied his wife, "only I never dreamed of such a guest as has been suggested."

"Of course, sister, I only said what I did as a suggestion," Mrs. Whately answered with dignity. "You are in your own home. I merely felt reluctant that this Yankee should have a chance to say that we were so rude and uncivilized that we couldn't appreciate good treatment when we received it. There's no harm in gaining his goodwill,

either, for he said that his general, with the main force, would be here to-morrow."

"Mrs. Baron," said her husband in strong irritation, "don't you see there is nothing left for us to do? No matter how things turn out, the presence of these Yankees involves what is intensely disagreeable. If sister is right in regard to this man—and I suppose I must admit she is till I know him better—he has made it necessary for our own self-respect to treat him with courtesy. Our pride will not permit us to accept this from him and make no return. It may be Yankee cunning which led him to foresee this, for I suppose it is pleasing to many of the tribe to gain their ends by *finesse*. Probably if this doesn't secure them, he will try harsher methods. Anyway, as long as he plays at the game of courtesy, we, as sister says, should teach him that we know what the word means. The mischief is that you never can know just what a Yankee is scheming for or aiming at."

"Well, brother, supposing your words are true, as I do not think they are in this instance, it is due to our dignity that we act like sincere people who are above even suspecting unworthy motives. We do not compromise ourselves in the matter. We only meet courtesy with courtesy, like well-bred people."

"Well, so be it then. In fact, I would like to ask this man what he and those he represents can hope to gain by invasion equalled only by that of the Goths and Vandals."

CHAPTER XIV

A THREAT

THE moment Chunk believed that Scoville could dispense with his services for a time he made his way promptly to the back veranda and gave a low, peculiar whistle which Zany recognized. He had ceased in her estimation to be merely a subject for infinite jest. Though not very advanced in the scale of civilization, she was influenced by qualities which appealed to her mind, and possessed many traits common to her sex. His shrewdness and courage were making good his lack of inches. Above all, he was in favor with the "head Linkum man," and Zany belonged to that class ever ready to greet the rising sun. While all this was true, she could not be herself and abandon her coquettish impulses and disposition to tease. She came slowly from the dining-room and looked over Chunk's head as if she could not see him. Bent on retaliation, he stepped behind her, lifted her in his powerful arms and carried her on a full run to some screening shrubbery, the irate captive cuffing his ear soundly all the way. Setting her down, he remarked quietly, "Now I reckon you kin fin' me."

"Yo' wool git gray 'fo' you fin' me agin," she replied, making a feint of starting for the house.

"Berry well, Miss Zany. I see you doan want ter be a free gyurl. I'se tell Marse Scoville you no 'count niggah."

"W'at you want anyhow, imperdence?"

"I wants sup'n ter eat. Does you 'spects I kin ride all

night en all day ter brung you freedom, en den not eben git a good word? You ain' fit fer freedom. I'se tell some nachel-bawn fool ter gib you a yaller rib'on en den dere be two ob you."

"La now, Chunk," she replied, coming back, "ef I wuz lookin' fer a fool I des stay right yere. Ef you git a pa'r ob steps en look in my face you'd see I'se bettah fren' ter you ner you ter me. You stay yere en I brings you w'at you tink a heap on mor'n me," and now she darted away with intentions satisfactory to her strategic admirer.

Chunk grinned and soliloquized, "Reck'n I kin fotch dat gyurl roun' wid all her contrariations. I des likes her skittishness, but I ain' tellin' her so, kaze I gwine ter hab my han's full as 'tis."

Zany soon returned with a plate well heaped, for at this time her argus-eyed mistress was sitting in the parlor, awaiting whatever fate the ruthless Yankees might impose. Chunk sat Turk-fashion on the ground and fell to as if famished, meanwhile listening eagerly to the girl's account of what had happened during his absence.

"Hi!" said Zany disdainfully, "you'd mek lub ter Aun' Suke ef she fed you."

"I kin mek mo'n lub," Chunk answered, nodding at her portentously; "I kin mek mischief."

"Reck'n you do dat anyhow."

"See yere, Zany, does you tink Marse Scoville a fool?"

"Ob co'se not."

"Well, he doan tink me a fool. Whose 'pinion's wuth de mos'? Who took keer on 'im? Who got 'im off safe right un'er de nose ob one ob Mad Whately's sogers? Who brung 'im back des in time ter stop dat ar mar'age en gib we uns freedom? You mighty peart, but you got a heap ter larn 'fo' you cut yo' eye-tooths."

"Some folks gits dere eye-tooths en doan git nuthin' wid 'em," Zany remarked nonchalantly. "I'se 'mit dough dat you comin' on, Chunk. W'en you gits growed up you'se be right smart."

"I doan min' de foolishness ob yo' talk, Zany," Chunk replied coolly, between his huge mouthfuls. "Dat's in you, en you kyant he'p hit any mo'n a crow cawin'. I'se allus mek 'lowance fer dat. I des 'proves dis 'casion ter 'zort you ter be keerful w'at you *does*. Dere's gwine ter be mighty ticklish times—sorter flash-bang times, yer know. I'se a free man—des ez free as air, en I'se hired mysef ter Marse Scoville ter wait on 'im. I'se growed up anuff ter know he kin tek de shine off eny man I eber see, or you neider. He yo' boss now well ez mine. I'se gib 'im a good report on you ef I kin. I'se feard, howsomeber, dat he say you outgrowed yo' sense."

"Dar now, Chunk, you puttin' on mo' airs dan Marse Scoville hissef. He des ez perlite ter marster en ole miss ez ef he come ter pay his 'spects ter dem en he look at Miss Lou ez a cat do at cream."

"Hi! dat so? No won'er he want ter git ahaid ob de parson en dat weddin' business."

"Oh, yo' orful growed up en ain' fin' dat out?"

"I 'spicioned it. Well, de ting fer you'n me is ter he'p 'im."

"La, now," replied Zany, proposing to give a broad hint at the same time, "I ain' gwine ter he'p no man in sech doin's. De cream neber goes ter de cat."

"Yere, tek de plate, Zany, wid my tanks," said Chunk, rising. "Sech cream ez you gits orful sour ef de cat doan fin' it sud'n. I'se took my 'zert now," and he caught her up again and kissed her on the way back to the veranda.

This time his performances were seen by Aun' Suke, who stood in the kitchen door. She snatched up a pail of water, exclaiming, "I cool you uns off, I sut'ny will. Sech goin's on!" But they were too quick for her. Zany pretended to be as irate as she was secretly pleased, while Chunk caused the old woman to boil over with rage by declaring, "Aun' Suke, I sen' a soger yere ter hab you 'rested for 'zorderly conduct."

"Ef you eber comes ter dis kitchen agin I'se emty de pot

ob bilin' water on you," cried Aun' Suke, retreating to her domain.

"Ef you does, you get yosef ober haid en years in hot water," Chunk answered with exasperating *sang froid.* "You niggahs gwine ter fin' out who's who on dis plantashun 'fo' yo' nex' birthday."

Zany's only response was a grimace, and he next carried his exaggerated sense of importance to his granny's cabin. He had seen Aun' Jinkey and spoken a few reassuring words as he passed with Scoville's attacking force. Since that time she had done a power of "projeckin' " over her corncob pipe, but events were now hurrying toward conclusions beyond her ken. It has already been observed that Aun' Jinkey was a neutral power. As yet, the weight of her decision had been cast neither for the North nor the South, while the question of freedom remained to be smoked over indefinitely. There was no indecision in her mind, however, in regard to her young mistress, and greater even than her fears when she heard the sounds of conflict was her solicitude over the possibility of a forced marriage. Since she was under the impression that her cabin might soon become again the refuge of one or the other of the contending powers, possibly of Miss Lou herself, she left the door ajar and was on the alert.

"Hi dar! granny," cried Chunk, the first to appear, "dat's right. Now you kin smoke in peace, fer you own yosef. Nobody come bossin' you yere any mo'."

"Doan you git so bumptious all ter oncet," said Aun' Jinkey. "Does you 'spect de hull top's gwine ter be tu'ned right ober down'erds in er day? But dar! you ain' no 'sper'ience. Yo' stomack emty en you' haid light. Draw up now en tell me de news. Tell me sud'n 'bout Miss Lou. Did dey git her mar'd?"

"Yah! yah! Marse Scoville's so'd ud cut de knot ef dey had."

"Dat's des ez much ez you knows. All de so'ds eber flash kyant cut dat ar knot 'less dey kill Marse Whately."

"Dat 'min's me ob someting ter'ble quar. Marse Scoville had he so'd pintin' right agin Mad Whately's neck en yit he ain' jab 'im. Dat same Mad Whately gwine ter mek a heap ob trouble fer he got clean off."

"Marse Scoville know dat ef he kill a man right straight wid he own han' he spook come and mek a heap mo' trouble."

"Hi! didn't tink o' dat."

"Bettah tink right smart, Chunk. You'se gittin' top-heaby ef you is sho't. Now tell me all 'bout de mar'age."

"Dey ain' no mar'age. Zany tole me how Miss Lou say she ain' neber 'sent, en den 'fo' dey could say dere lingo ober her en mar'y her des ez dey would a bale ob cotton, up rides Marse Scoville en put his so'd troo ebryting. He tells us we all free en—"

"En eat yo' supper. I ain' done projeckin' 'bout dis freedom business. How we uns gwine ter be free 'less Marse Scoville stay yere en kep us free?"

"Zany guv me my supper en—"

"Dar now, I ain' no mo' 'count. Zany gobble you aready. I des stick ter my chimbly corner."

"Howdy, Aunt Jinkey," cried Scoville, coming in briskly. "Well, you see I'm back again as I promised."

"You welcome, a hun'erd times welcome, kaze you kep my young mistis fum bein' mar'ed right slap 'gin her own feelin's ter her cousin."

"Pshaw! Aunt Jinkey. No one can marry a girl against her will in this country."

"Dat des de question Miss Lou en me projeckin' 'bout dis berry mawnin'. She gyardeens went straight along ez ef dey had de po'r, dey sut'ny did. Dat's w'at so upset Miss Lou en me. De po'r ob gyardeens is sump'n I kyant smoke out straight, en I des lak ter know how much dey *kin* do. Ole mars'r al'ays manage her prop'ty en we wuz flustrated w'en we see 'im en Mad Whately en he moder en ole miss en all gittin' ready fer de weddin' des ez ef hit was comin' like sun-up sho."

"It was a shame," cried Scoville angrily. "They were seeking to drive her into submission by strong, steady pressure, but if she insisted on her right—"

"Dat des w'at she did, Marse Scoville. She say she neber 'sent, *neber*," Chunk interrupted.

"Then the whole Southern Confederacy could not have married her and she ought to know it."

"Well, you mus' be 'siderate, Marse Scoville. Miss Lou know a heap 'bout some tings en she des a chile 'bout oder tings. Ole mars'r en misus al'ays try ter mek her tink dat only w'at dey say is right en nuthin' else, en dey al'ays 'low ter her dat she gwine ter mar'y her cousin some day, en she al'ays 'low ter me she doan wanter."

"Poor child! she does need a friend in very truth. What kind of a man is this Mad Whately anyway, that he could think of taking part in such a wrong?"

"He de same kin' ob man dat he wuz a boy," Chunk answered. "Den he kick en howl till he git w'at he want. 'Scuse me, Marse Scoville, but I kyant hep tinkin' you mek big 'stake dat you didn't jab 'im w'en you hab de chance."

"Chunk," was the grave answer, "if you are going to wait on me you must learn my ways. I'd no more kill a man when it was not essential than I would kill you this minute. Soldiers are not butchers."

"Granny sez how you wuz feared on his spook"—

"Bah! you expect to be free, yet remain slaves to such fears? My horse knows better. Come, Aunt Jinkey, I'd rather you would give me some supper than your views on spooks."

"Leftenant," said Perkins, the overseer, from the door, "Mr. Baron pr'sents his compliments en gives you a invite to supper."

Scoville thought a moment, then answered, "Present mine in return, and say it will give me pleasure to accept."

"Bress de Lawd! you gwine ter de big house. Not dat I 'grudges cookin' fer you w'eneber you come, but I des

wants you ter took a 'tunerty ter advise dat po' chile 'bout she rights en de mar'age question."

After assuring himself that the overseer was out of earshot, Scoville said almost sternly, "Aunt Jinkey, you and Chunk must not say one word of my ever having been here before. It might make your young mistress a great deal of trouble, and I should be sorry indeed if I ever caused her any trouble whatever." Then as he made his way to the mansion he smilingly soliloquized, "I don't know of any other question concerning which I would rather give her advice, nor would it be wholly disinterested, I fear, if I had a chance. At this time to-morrow," he sighingly concluded, "I may be miles away or dead. Poor unsophisticated child! I never was touched so close before as now by her need of a friend who cares more for her than his own schemes."

Chunk following at a respectful distance became aware that the overseer was glowering at him. "Bettah 'lebe yo' min', Marse Perkins," he remarked condescendingly.

"You infernal, horse-stealing nigger!" was the low response.

"Hi! Marse Perkins, you kin growl, but you muzzled all de same."

"The muzzle may be off before many mo' sunsets, en then you'll find my teeth in your throat," said the man under his breath, and his look was so dark and vindictive that even in his elation Chunk became uneasy.

CHAPTER XV

MISS LOU EMANCIPATED

NATURE had endowed Scoville with a quick, active mind, and circumstances had developed its power and capacity to a degree scarcely warranted by his age. Orphaned early in life, compelled to hold his own among comparative strangers since childhood, he had gained a worldly wisdom and self-reliance which he could not have acquired in a sheltered home. He had learned to look at facts and people squarely, to estimate values and character promptly, and then to decide upon his own action unhesitatingly. Although never regarded as the model good boy at the boarding-schools wherein he had spent most of his life, he had been a general favorite with both teachers and scholars. A certain frankness in mischief and buoyancy of spirit had carried him through all difficulties, while his apt mind and retentive memory always kept him near to the head of his classes. The quality of alertness was one of his characteristics. In schools and at the university he quickly mastered their small politics and prevailing tendencies, and he often amused his fellow-pupils with free-handed yet fairly truthful sketches of their instructors. As the country passed into deeper and stronger excitement over the prospect of secession and its consequences, he was among the first to catch the military spirit and to take an active part in the formation of a little company among the students. It was not his disposition to be excited merely because others were. Certain qualities of mind led him to look beneath the surface for the causes of national commo-

tion. He read carefully the utterances of leaders, North and South, and to some extent traced back their views and animating spirit to historical sources.

In the year of '63 he found to his joy that he had attained such physical proportions as would secure his acceptance in a cavalry regiment forming in his vicinity. His uncle, who was also guardian, for reasons already known, made slight opposition, and he at once donned the blue with its bluff trimmings. In camp and field he quickly learned the routine of duty, and then his daring, active temperament led him gradually into the scouting service. Now, although so young, he was a veteran in experience, frank to friends, but secretive and ready to deceive the very elect among his enemies. Few could take more risks than he, yet he had not a particle of Mad Whately's recklessness. Courage, but rarely impulse, controlled his action. As we have seen, he could instantly stay his hand the second a deadly enemy, seeking his life in personal encounter, was disarmed.

The prospect of talking with such a host as Mr. Baron pleased him immensely. He scarcely knew to whom he was indebted for the courtesy, but rightly surmised that it was Mrs. Whately, since she, with good reason, felt under obligations to him. Even more than an adventurous scouting expedition he relished a situation full of humor, and such his presence at Mr. Baron's supper-table promised to be. He knew his entertainment would be gall and wormwood to the old Bourbon and his wife, and that the courtesy had been wrung from them by his own forbearance. It might be his only opportunity to see Miss Lou and suggest the liberty he had brought to her as well as to the slaves.

Mrs. Whately met him on the veranda and said politely, "Lieutenant Scoville, you have proved yourself to be a generous and forbearing enemy. If you feel that you can meet frank enemies who wish to return courtesy with courtesy, we shall be glad to have you take supper with us."

"Yes," added Mr. Baron, "my sister has convinced me,

somewhat against my will, I must in honesty admit, that such hospitality as we can offer under the circumstances is your due."

"I appreciate the circumstances, Mr. Baron," was the grave reply, "and honor the Southern trait which is so strong that even I can receive the benefit of it. Your courtesy, madam, will put me at ease."

Miss Lou, thinking it possible that she might see the Northern officer again, had taken her own way of convincing him that he was still within the bounds of civilization, for she made a toilet more careful than the one with which she had deigned to grace the appointed day of her wedding. She could scarcely believe her eyes when, entering the supper room a little late, she saw Scoville already seated at the table. He instantly rose and made her a ceremonious bow, thus again indicating that their past relations should be completely ignored in the presence of others. She therefore gravely returned his salutation and took her place without a word, but her high color did not suggest indifference to the situation. Mr. Baron went through the formal "grace" as usual and then said, "Ahem! you will admit, sir, that it is a little embarrassing to know just how to entertain one with whom we have some slight difference of opinion."

"Perhaps such embarrassment will be removed if we all speak our minds freely," replied Scoville, pleasantly. "Pardon the suggestion, but the occasion appears to me favorable to a frank and interesting exchange of views. If my way of thinking were wholly in accord with yours my words could be little better than echoes. I should be glad to feel that my presence was no restraint whatever."

"I'm inclined to think you are right, sir," added Mrs. Whately. "It would be mere affectation on our part to disguise our thoughts and feelings. With neighbors, and even with friends, we are often compelled to do this, but I scarcely see why we should do so with an open enemy."

"And such I trust you will find me, madam, an *open* enemy in the better sense of the adjective. As far as I can,

I will answer questions if you wish to ask any. I will tell you honestly all the harm I meditate and outline clearly the extent of my hostility, if you will do the same," and he smiled so genially that she half smiled also as she answered:

"To hear you, sir, one would scarcely imagine you to be an enemy at all. But then we know better."

"Yes, sir, pardon me, we do," said Mr. Baron, a little stiffly. "For one, I would like your honest statement of just what harm you and your command meditate. I am one who would rather face and prepare for whatever I shall be compelled to meet."

"I think, sir, you have already met and faced the direst event of the evening—my presence at your hospitable board. Even this hardship is due to your courtesy, not to my compulsion."

Miss Lou bowed low over her plate at this speech.

"But how about the long hours of the night, sir? Have you such control over your men—"

"Yes, sir!" interrupted Scoville with dignity. "The men I have with me are soldiers, not camp-followers. They would no more harm you or anything you possess, without orders, than I would."

"Without orders—a clause of large latitude. As far as words go you have already robbed me of the greater part of my possessions. You have told my slaves that they are free."

"Not upon my own responsibility, sir, although with hearty goodwill. In my humble station I am far more often called upon to obey orders than to give them. You are aware of President Lincoln's proclamation?"

"Yes, sir, and of the Pope's bull against the comet."

Scoville laughed so genially as partially to disarm his reply of its sting. "In this instance, sir, our armies are rather gaining on the comet."

"But what can you and your armies hope to accomplish?" Mrs. Whately asked. "If you should destroy

every Southern man, the women would remain unsubdued."

"Now, madam, you have me at disadvantage. I do not know what we would or could do if confronted only by implacable Southern women."

"Do not imagine that I am jesting. I cannot tell you how strange it seems that a man of your appearance and evident character should be among our cruel enemies."

"And yet, Mrs. Whately, you cannot dispute the fact. Pardon me for saying it, but I think that is just where the South is in such serious error. It shuts its eyes to so many simple facts—a course which experience proves is never wise. I may declare, and even believe, that there is no solid wall before me, yet if I go headlong against it, I am bruised all the same. Positive beliefs do not create truths. I fancy that a few hours since you were absolutely sure that this courtesy of which I am the grateful recipient could not be, yet you were mistaken."

"Has not the sad experience of many others inspired our fears? Neither has the end come with us yet. You said that the main Northern force would come this way tomorrow. We do not fear you and those whom you control, but how about those who are to come?"

"I can speak only for the class to which I belong—the genuine soldiers who are animated by as single and unfaltering a spirit as the best in your armies. If a Confederate column were going through the North you could not answer for the conduct of every lawless, depraved man in such a force. Still, I admit with you that war is essentially cruel, and that the aim ever must be to inflict as much injury as possible on one's adversaries."

"But how can you take part in such a war?" Mrs. Whately asked. "All we asked was to be let alone."

"Yes, sir," added Mr. Baron, "how can you justify these ruthless invasions, this breaking up of our domestic institutions, this despoiling of our property and rights by

force?" and there was a tremor of suppressed excitement in his voice.

Scoville glanced at Miss Lou to see how far she sympathized with her kindred. He observed that her face was somewhat stern in its expression, yet full of intelligent interest. It was not the index of mere prejudice and hate. "Yes," he thought, "she is capable of giving me a fair hearing; the others are not. Mr. Baron," he said, "your views are natural, perhaps, if not just. I know it is asking much of human nature when you are suffering and must suffer so much, to form what will become the historical judgment on the questions at issue. The law under which the North is fighting is the supreme one—that of self-preservation. Even if we had let you alone—permitted you to separate and become independent without a blow, war would have come soon. You would not and could not have let *us* alone. Consider but one point: your slaves would merely have to pass the long boundary line stretching nearly across the continent, in order to be on free soil. You could compel their return only by conquering and almost annihilating the North. You will say that we should think as you do on the subject, and I must answer that it is every man and woman's right to think according to individual conscience, according to the light within. Deny this right, and you put no bounds to human slavery. Pardon me, but looking in your eyes and those of these ladies, I can see that I should become a slave instantly if you had your way. Unconsciously and inevitably you would make me one, for it is your strongest impulse to make me agree with you, to see things exactly as you do. The fact that you sincerely believe you are right would make no difference if I just as sincerely believed you were wrong. If I could not think and act for myself I should be a slave. You might say, 'We *know* we are right, that what we believe has the Divine sanction.' That is what the tormentors of the Inquisition said and believed; that is what my Puritan and persecuting forefathers said and believed; what does

history say now? The world is growing wise enough to understand that God has no slaves. He endows men and women with a conscience. The supreme obligation is to be true to this. When any one who has passed the bounds of childhood says to us, 'I don't think this is right,' we take an awful responsibility, we probably are guilty of usurpation, if we substitute our will for his. In our sincerity we may argue, reason and entreat, but in the presence of another's conscience unconvinced and utterly opposed to us, where is human slavery to end if one man, or a vast number of men, have the power to say, 'You shall' ?"

Scoville had kept his eyes fixed on Mr. Baron, and saw that he was almost writhing under the expression of views so repugnant to him—views which proved his whole scheme of life and action to be wrong. Now the young man turned his glance suddenly on Miss Lou, and in her high color, parted lips and kindled eyes, saw abundant proof that she, as he had wished, was taking to herself the deep personal application of his words. Her guardians and Mrs. Whately observed this truth also, and now bitterly regretted that they had invited the Union officer. It seemed to them a sort of malign fate that he had been led, unconsciously as they supposed, to pronounce in the presence of the girl such vigorous condemnation of their action. Had they not that very day sought to override the will, the conscience, the whole shrinking, protesting womanhood of the one who had listened so eagerly as the wrong meditated against her was explained? Scoville had not left them even the excuse that they believed they were right, having shown the girl that so many who believed this were wrong. Miss Lou's expression made at least one thing clear—she was emancipated and had taken her destiny into her own hands.

Mrs. Whately felt that she must turn the tables at once, and so remarked, "It seems to me that the whole force of your argument tells against the North. You are bent upon conquering the South and making it think as you do."

"Oh, no. Here the law of self-preservation comes in.

If the South can secede, so can the East and the West. New York City can secede from the State. We should have no country. There could be no national life. Would England accept the doctrine of secession, and permit any part of her dominions to set up for themselves when they chose? I know you are about to say that is just what our fathers did. Yes, but old mother England did not say, 'Go, my children, God bless you!' Nor would she say it now to any other region over which floats her flag. Of course, if you whip us, we shall have to submit, just as England did. What government has helplessly sucked its thumbs when certain portions of the territory over which it had jurisdiction defied its power? We are called Goths and Vandals, but that is absurd. We are not seeking to conquer the South in any such old-world ways. We are fighting that the old flag may be as supreme here as in New England. The moment this is true you will be as free as are the people of New England. The same constitution and laws will govern all."

"And can you imagine for a moment, sir," cried Mr. Baron, "that we will submit to a government that would be acceptable to New England?"

"Yes, sir; and years hence, when the South has become as loyal as New England is now, if that abode of the Yankees should seek independence of the rest of the country she would be brought back under the flag. I would fight New England as readily as I do the South, if she sought to break up the Union. I would fight her if every man, woman and child within her borders believed themselves right."

Now he saw Miss Lou looking perplexed. Her quick mind detected the spirit of coercion, of substituting wills, against which he had been inveighing and from which she had suffered. Mrs. Whately was quick to see the apparent weakness in his argument, for she said, "Consistency is a jewel which I suppose is little cared for by those so ready to appeal to force. With one breath you say we must not coerce the wills of others, and now you say you would,

even though you did violence to universal and sacred beliefs."

"I say only that the nation *must* do this as must the individual. Some one might say to me, 'I honestly think I should take off your right arm.' I would not permit it if I could help it. No more can a nation submit passively to dismemberment. The South did not expect that this nation would do so. It promptly prepared for war. If the North had said, 'We can do nothing, there's a blank, write out your terms and we'll sign,' we would have been more thoroughly despised than we were, if that were possible. There are two kinds of coercion. For instance, I do not say to you, Mrs. Whately, representing the South, that you must think and feel as I do and take just such steps as I dictate; but that there are things which you must refrain from doing, because in their performance, no matter how sincere you were, you would inflict great and far-reaching wrong on others. There could be no government without restriction. We would soon have anarchy if any part of a nation should and could withdraw when it chose and how it pleased."

"Your doctrine, sir, would banish freedom from the world. All peoples would have to submit to the central tyranny called government, even though such government had become hateful."

"This doctrine, which all governments act upon," replied Scoville pleasantly, "has not banished freedom from the world. In this country, where every man has a voice, the government will be just about as good as the majority determine it shall be."

"Well, sir, to sum up the whole matter," said Mr. Baron coldly, "two things are clear: First, the South is determined to be free; second, if we fail we can be held only under the heel of your Northern majority as Poland is trodden upon."

Scoville saw that the discussion had gone far enough for his purposes, and he said with a good-natured laugh, "I'm

neither a prophet nor his son, but I think it is a very hopeful sign that we could have this frank interchange of views and belief. I see how perfectly sincere you are, and if I had been brought up here no doubt I should think and act as you do. As it is, I am only a very humble representative of the Government which is trying to preserve its own existence—a Government which the South helped to form as truly as the North. If I should come directly to your side, contrary to belief and conscience, you would be the first to despise me. I suppose we will all agree that we should obey the supreme dictates of conscience?"

"No, sir," burst out Mr. Baron, "I cannot agree to anything of the kind. There are multitudes who must be guided and controlled by those who are wiser, older and more experienced. Why, sir, you would have the very nursery children in flat rebellion."

"Indeed, Mr. Baron, I have not said one word against the authority of parents and guardians."

"Ah! I am glad you draw the line somewhere. Half the misery in the world results from young people's thinking themselves wiser than their natural advisers. If they can merely say their consciences are against what their elders know is right and best, we have anarchy in the fountain-head of society—the family," and he glared for a moment at his niece.

"What you say seems very true, Mr. Baron. I should be glad to know where *you* draw the line? Independent action must begin at some period."

While Mr. Baron hesitated over this rather embarrassing question Miss Lou startled all her kindred by saying, "I did not intend to take any part in this conversation, but a glance from my uncle makes his last remark personal to me. I am at least old enough to ask one or two questions. Do you think it right, Lieutenant Scoville, that a woman should never have any independent life of her own?"

"Why, Miss Baron, what a question! Within the re-

ceived limits of good taste a woman has as much right to independent action as a man."

"Well, then, how can she ever have any independence if she is treated as a child up to one day of her life, and the next day is expected to promise she will obey a man as long as he lives?"

The angry spots in Mrs. Baron's cheeks had been burning deeper and deeper, and now she spoke promptly and freezingly, "Mr. Scoville, I absolve you from answering one who is proving herself to be neither a child nor a refined woman. I did not expect this additional humiliation. If it had not occurred I would have taken no part in the conversation. Mr. Baron, I think we have granted even more than the most quixotic idea of courtesy could demand."

"'Granted? demand?' surely there is some mistake, madam," said Scoville with dignity, as he rose instantly from the table. "I have asked nothing whatever except that you should dismiss your fears as far as I and my men are concerned."

Mrs. Whately was provoked equally at herself and all the others. She now deeply regretted that she had not left the Union officer to obtain his supper where and how he could, but felt that she must smooth matters over as far as possible. "Lieutenant Scoville," she said hurriedly, "you must make allowances for people in the deepest stress of trouble. We did intend all the courtesy which our first remarks defined. Of course you cannot know our circumstances, and when words are spoken which cut to the quick it is hard to give no sign. Perhaps our hearts are too sore and our differences too radical—" and she hesitated.

"I understand you, madam," said Scoville, bowing. "I can only repeat my assurances of your safety and express my regret—"

"Oh, shame!" cried Miss Lou, whose anger and indignation now passed all bounds. "We are *not* in the deepest stress of trouble, and you, Mrs. Whately, are the last one

to say it. I saw this gentleman's sabre poised at your son's throat long enough to have killed him twice over, and he did not do it, even in the excitement of defending his own life. After Mrs. Baron's words he again assures us of safety. What did you all predict would happen immediately when Northern soldiers came? Whether I am refined or not, I am at least grateful. Lieutenant, please come with me. I will try to prove that I appreciate your courtesy and forbearance," and she led the way from the room.

He bowed ceremoniously to Mr. Baron and the ladies, then followed the girl, leaving them almost paralyzed by their conflicting emotions.

CHAPTER XVI

A SMILE ON WAR'S GRIM FACE

MISS LOU led the way to the broad, moonlit piazza. As Scoville followed, he saw that the girl was trembling violently, and he was thus able to grasp in some degree the courage she was manifesting in her first half-desperate essays toward freedom. "Poor child!" he thought, "her fright is surpassed only by her determination. How easily they could manage her by a little tact and kindness!"

She pointed to a chair near the hall door and faltered, "Lieutenant Scoville, I scarcely know whether I am doing right in seeing you here alone. I know little of the usages of society. I do not wish to appear to you unrefined."

"Miss Baron," he replied kindly, "I do not know why you have not the same right which other young ladies enjoy, of entertaining a gentleman at your home."

"Oh, I am so glad that you are not angry."

"I was never more lamb-like in my disposition than at this moment. Moreover, I wish to thank you as a brave girl and a genuine lady."

She was almost panting in her strong excitement and embarrassment. "Please remember," she said, "that I do not wish to do or say anything unbecoming, but I know so little and have been so tried—"

"Miss Baron," and he spoke low for fear he would be overheard, "I already know something of what you have passed through and of your brave assertion of a sacred

right. Continue that assertion and no one can force you into marriage. I have ridden nearly twenty-four hours to be here in time and to make some return for your great kindness, but you were so brave that you scarcely needed help."

"Oh! I did need it. I was so frightened and so desperate that I was almost ready to faint. My cousin is one who *will* have his own way. He has never been denied a thing in his life. I should have been taken away at least and then—oh, I just felt as if on the edge of a precipice. It seems dreadful that I should be speaking so of my kindred to a stranger and enemy—"

"Enemy! Far from it. A friend. Have you not protected my life and liberty? Miss Baron, I give you my sacred word, I swear to you by my mother's memory to be as loyal to you as if you were my own sister. Young as I am, perhaps I can advise you and help you, for it is indeed clear that you need a friend."

"I cannot tell you what relief your words bring, for, inexperienced as I am, something assures me that I can trust you."

"Indeed you can. I should spoil my own life more truly than yours if I were not true to my oath. Please remember this and have confidence. That is what you need most—confidence. Believe in yourself as well as in me. Have you not been brave and true to yourself in the most painful of ordeals? Try to keep your self-control and you will make no serious mistakes, and never so misjudge me as to imagine I shall not recognize your good intentions."

"Ah!" she sighed, with a rush of tears, "that's the trouble. I'm so hasty; I lose my temper."

He smiled very genially as he said, "If you were as amiable as some girls you would have been married before this. Don't you see in what good stead your high spirit has stood you? I do not censure righteous anger when you are wronged. You are one who could not help such anger, and, if controlled, it will only help you. All I ask

is that you so control it as to take no false steps and keep well within your certain rights. You are in a peculiarly painful position. Your kindred truly mean well by you—see how fair I am—but if they could carry out their intentions and marry you to that spoiled boy, you would be one of the most unhappy of women. If he is capable of trying to force you to marry him he would always be imperious and unreasonable. You would be a hard one to manage, Miss Baron, by the words, You must, and You shall; but I think Please would go a good way if your reason and conscience were satisfied."

"Indeed, sir, you are right. If I loved my cousin I would marry him even though he were so badly wounded as to be helpless all his life. But my whole soul protests against the thought of marriage to any one. Why, sir, you can't know how like a child I've always been treated. I feel that I have a right to remain as I am, to see more of the world, to know more and enjoy more of life. I can scarcely remember when I was truly happy, so strictly have I been brought up. You would not believe it, but poor old Aun' Jinkey, my mammy, is almost the only one who has not always tried to make me do something whether I wish to or not. My aunt, Mrs. Whately, has meant to be kind, but even in my childish squabbles with my cousin, and in his exactions, she always took his part. I just want to be free—that's all."

"Well, Miss Baron, you are free now, and if you will simply assert your rights with quiet dignity you can remain free. Your kindred are mistaken in their attitude toward you, and you can make them see this in time. They are well-bred people and are not capable of using force or violence. They did, I suppose, believe terrible things of me and those I represent, and their action, perhaps, has been due partially to panic. That crisis is past; you have only to trust your own best instincts in order to meet future emergencies. Whatever comes, remember that your Northern friend said he had confidence that you would do what is

brave and right. Perhaps we shall never meet again, for we are in the midst of a fierce, active campaign. There is much advice I would like to give you, but we shall not be left alone long, and the best thing now, after this long, hard day, is for you to get your mind quiet and hopeful. How quiet and peaceful everything is! not a harsh sound to be heard."

"Yes, and think what they tried to make me believe! They all should be treating you with kindness instead of—" but here she was interrupted by the appearance of Mrs. Whately.

In order to understand that lady's action and that of her relatives, we must go back to the moment when Miss Lou and Scoville left the supper-room. Mrs. Whately was the first to recover her self-possession and some true appreciation of their situation. Mr. Baron in his rage would have gone out and broken up the conference on the piazza, but his sister said almost sternly, "Sit down."

"Well," ejaculated Mrs. Baron, bitterly, "I hope you are both satisfied now with the results of courtesy to Yankees. I knew I was right in believing that we could have nothing whatever to do with them. I think it is monstrous that Louise is alone with one on the piazza, and her uncle should interfere at once."

"Brother," said Mrs. Whately, "you can see our niece through the window from where you sit. She is talking quietly with the officer."

"Yes, and what may he not say to her? Already her contumacious rebellion passes all bounds. She has heard too much incendiary talk from him already" and he again rose to end the interview.

"Hector Baron," said his sister solemnly, "you must listen to me first, before you take any further steps. We will say nothing more about the past. It's gone and can't be helped. Now, with all the influence I have over you, I urge you and your wife to remain here until you are calm —till you have had a chance to think. Is this a time for

headlong anger? Was there ever a period in your life when you should so carefully consider the consequences of your action? Please tell me how you and sister are going to *make* Louise do and think exactly what you wish. This is no time for blinking the truth that you have alienated her. You could easily now drive her to do something rash and terrible. I understand her better every moment and feel that we have taken the wrong course. She would have gone away with Madison as his cousin, and wifehood would have come naturally later. We have been too hasty, too arbitrary. You both must recognize the truth that you cannot treat her as a child any longer or you will lose her altogether, for in this matter of marriage she has been made to know that she is not a child. She can be led into it now, but not forced into it. Her course is open now, but if you continue arbitrary her action may become clandestine and even reckless. Then in regard to this Yankee officer. Alas! what he says is too true. In our strong feeling we shut our eyes to facts. Are we not in his power? He has spared my son's life and your property and home, and yet he has been virtually ordered out of the house. There is truth in what Louise said. We are not in the deepest stress of trouble—infinitely removed from the trouble we might be in."

"He has not spared my property," growled Mr. Baron, "he has told all my people they are free. Where does that leave me?"

"Now, brother, your very words prove how essential it is that you regain your self-control and reason. Is this young officer going through the country on his own responsibility? He only echoes the proclamation of Abe Lincoln, whom he is bound to obey. Since we entered on the discussion of our differences could we expect him to do otherwise than present his side as strongly as he could? Now if you and sister can shake all this off by one mighty effort of your wills, do so; but if we do not wish to invite every evil we predicted, do let us be calm and rational. For one,

I feel Louise's reproof keenly, and it will not do to outrage her sense of justice any longer. This officer has proved that we were wrong in our predictions before he came. If now we continue to treat him as outside the pale of courtesy, we lose her sympathy utterly and do our utmost to provoke him and his men. Merciful heaven! if my son were a bleeding corpse or dying in agony, what would the world be to me? I shall apologize to him and treat him with politeness as long as I am under his protection."

"I shall have nothing to do with him," said Mrs. Baron, pressing her thin lips together.

"Well, well," ejaculated Mr. Baron, "I suppose I shall have to become meeker than Moses, and kiss every rod that smites me for fear of getting a harsher blow."

Mrs. Whately felt that it was useless to say anything more, and, as we have seen, joined her niece.

"Lieutenant," she said, "we owe you an apology, and I freely and frankly offer it. I fear you think we are making sorry return for your kindness."

"Mrs. Whately, I appreciate *your* good intentions, and I can make allowance for the feelings of my host and hostess. The fine courtesy of Miss Baron would disarm hostility itself, but I assure you that there is no personal hostility on my part to any of you."

"Well, sir, I must say that I regard it as a very kind ordering of Providence that we have fallen into such hands as yours."

"I certainly am in no mood to complain," he replied, laughing. "Perhaps experience has taught us that we had better ignore our differences. I was just remarking to Miss Baron on the beauty and peacefulness of the night. Will you not join us? We can imagine a flag of truce flying, under which we can be just as good friends as we please."

"Thank you. I will join you with pleasure," and she sat down near her niece. "Well," she added, "this is a scene to be remembered."

Miss Lou looked at Scoville gratefully, for his words

and manner had all tended to reassure her. In her revolt, he showed no disposition to encourage recklessness on her part. As her mind grew calmer she saw more clearly the course he had tried to define—that of blended firmness and courtesy to her relatives. She was so unsophisticated and had been so confused and agitated, that she scarcely knew where to draw the line between simple, right action and indiscretion. Conscious of her inexperience, inclined to be both timid and reckless in her ignorance and trouble, she began even now to cling, metaphorically, to his strong, sustaining hand. His very presence produced a sense of restfulness and safety, and when he began to call attention to the scenes and sounds about them she was sufficiently quiet to be appreciative.

Dew sparkled in the grass of the lawn on which the shadows of trees and shrubbery fell motionless. The air was balmy and sweet with the fragrance of spring flowers. The mocking-birds were in full ecstatic song, their notes scaling down from bursts of melody to the drollery of all kinds of imitation. The wounded men on the far end of the piazza were either sleeping or talking in low tones, proving that there was no extremity of suffering. Off to the left, between them and the negro quarters, were two or three fires, around which the Union soldiers were reclining, some already asleep after the fatigues of the day, others playing cards or spinning yarns, while one, musically inclined, was evoking from a flute an air plaintive and sweet in the distance. Further away under the trees, shadows in shadow, the horses were dimly seen eating their provender. The Confederate prisoners, smoking about a fire, appeared to be taking the "horrors of captivity" very quietly and comfortably. At the quarters they heard the sound of negro-singing, half barbaric in its wildness.

"It is hard to realize that this scene means war," remarked Miss Lou, after they had gazed and listened a few moments in silence.

"Yet it does," said Scoville quietly. "Look down the

avenue. Do you not see the glint of the moonbeams on a carbine? All around us are men mounted and armed. If a shot were fired, we should all be ready for battle in three minutes. Those prisoners will be guarded with sleepless vigilance till I deliver them up. There is a sentinel at the back of the house, three guarding the out-buildings, and so it will be till I am relieved and another takes command."

"Who will he be?" she asked apprehensively.

"I do not know."

"Oh, I wish you could guard us till these troubles are over."

"I can honestly echo that wish," added Mrs. Whately.

"Thank you. It would be pleasanter duty than usually falls to the lot of a soldier. Yet in these times I scarcely know what my duty may be from hour to hour."

"You told us that we need not fear anything to-night," began Mrs. Whately.

"Not unless I am attacked, I said. I am aware that at this moment your son is seeking a force to do this. I do not think that he will be able to find any, however, before morning. In any event you could have nothing to fear from us, except as your dreams were disturbed by a battle."

"Oh, I wish I were a soldier!" exclaimed the girl. "This whole scene seems as if taken right out of a story."

"You are looking at this moment on the bright side of our life. At any rate, I'm glad you're not a soldier. If you were, my duty might be made more difficult. It has other and very different sides. By the way, I would like to watch those negroes a little while, and listen to them. Their performances always interest me deeply. Will not you ladies go with me? Soon I must get some rest while I can."

Miss Lou looked at her aunt, who hesitated a moment, then said, "I am very tired, Lieutenant. I will trust you as a chivalrous enemy to take my niece, and I will it here until you return."

"I deeply appreciate your kindness, madam."

Miss Lou went with him gladly and found herself at the close of the long, miserable day becoming positively happy. When out of hearing she said, "Aunt's permission almost took away my breath. Yet it seems to me just the way a girl ought to be treated. Oh, how perfectly delicious is a little bit of freedom! How perfectly grand to have something going on that does not mean no end of trouble to one's self!"

Scoville laughed lightly as he replied, "I now wish you were a soldier and an officer in my regiment. You and I would make good comrades."

"You forget, sir," she answered in like vein, "that I am a bloodthirsty little rebel."

"On the contrary, I remember that yours was the kind, pitying face which made me half fancy I was in heaven when recovering from my swoon."

"Chunk and Aun' Jinkey brought you back to earth right sudden, didn't they?" and her laugh rang out merrily.

"Sister," cried Mr. Baron, running out on the veranda, "what on earth—I thought I heard Louise laugh way off toward the quarters."

"You did."

"What! has she broken all bounds, defied all authority, and gone utterly wild in her rebellion?"

Mrs. Whately made a gesture of half irritable protest. Meantime, Mrs. Baron, hearing her husband's voice, came out and exclaimed, "Is that Louise and the Yankee yonder going off alone?"

"They are not 'going off.' You and brother may join them if you wish. They simply intend to watch the people at the quarters a little while, and I will wait here for them."

"Sarah Whately!" gasped Mrs. Baron, "can you mean to say that you have permitted our ward to do such an indelicate thing? She has never been permitted to go out

alone in the evening with any young man, and the idea that she should begin with a *Yankee!*"

"She is not alone. She is always within call and most of the time in sight. I will make one more effort to bring you both to reason," added Mrs. Whately, warmly, "and then, if we continue to differ so radically, I will return home in the morning, after giving Louise to understand that she can always find a refuge with me if it is necessary. Can you think I would let the girl whom my son hopes to marry do an indelicate thing? Pardon me, but I think I am competent to judge in such matters. I will be answerable for her conduct and that of Lieutenant Scoville also, for he is a gentleman if he is our enemy. I tell you again that your course toward Louise will drive her to open, reckless defiance. It is a critical time with her. She is my niece as well as your ward, and it is the dearest wish of myself and son that she should be bound to us by the closest ties. I will not have her future and all our hopes endangered by a petty, useless tyranny. If you will treat her like a young lady of eighteen I believe she will act like one."

Mrs. Baron was speechless in her anger, but her husband began, "Oh, well, if he were a Southern officer—"

Then the blood of her race became too hot for Mrs. Whately's control, and she sprang up, saying, "Well, then, go and tell him to his face that he's a vile Yankee, a Goth and Vandal, a ruthless invader, unworthy of a moment's trust, and incapable of behaving like a gentleman! Take no further protection at his hands. How can you be so blind as not to see I am doing the best thing possible to retain Louise within our control and lead her to fulfil our hopes? I ask you again, how are you going to *make* Louise do what you wish? You cannot be arbitrary with even one of your own slaves any longer."

"Well," said Mrs. Baron, "I wash my hands of it all," and she retired to her room. Mr. Baron sat down in a chair and groaned aloud. It was desperately hard for him to ac-

cept the strange truth that he could not order every one on the place, his niece included, to do just what pleased him. Never had an autocratic potentate been more completely nonplussed; but his sister's words, combined with events, brought him face to face with his impotence so inexorably that for a time he had nothing to say.

CHAPTER XVII

THE JOY OF FREEDOM

IN an open space near the quarters the negroes had kindled a fire, although the night was mild. These children of the sun love warmth and all that is cheerful and bright, their emotions appearing to kindle more readily with the leaping flames. When Miss Lou and Scoville approached, the worshippers were just concluding the hymn heard on the piazza. From the humble cabins stools, benches, rickety chairs, and nondescript seats made from barrels, had been brought and placed in a circle close about the fire. These were occupied by the elderly and infirm. Uncle Lusthah, whose name had been evolved from Methuselah, was the evident leader of the meeting, and Miss Lou whispered to her attendant, "He's the recognized preacher among them, and I believe he tries to live up to his ideas of right."

"Then I'll listen to him very respectfully," said Scoville.

Their advent created quite a commotion, and not a few were inclined to pay court to the "Linkum ossifer." All who had seats rose to offer them, but Scoville smiled, shook his head and waved them back. Uncle Lusthah immediately regained attention by shouting, "Look at me": then, "Now look up. Who we uns befo'? De King. De gret Jehovah. Bow yo' haids humble; drap yo' eyes. Tek off de shoon fum yo' feet lak Moses w'en he gwine neah de bunin' bush. Young mars'r en young mistis standin' dar 'spectful. Dey knows dat ef de gret Linkum yere hissef, Linkum's Lawd en Mars'r yere befo' 'im. Let us all gib

our 'tention ter 'Im who's brung 'liverance ter Israel at las'. We gwine troo de Red Sea ob wah now en des whar de promis' lan' is we got ter fin' out, but we hab tu'ned our backs on ole Egypt en we ain' gwine back no mo'. Brudren en sistas, you'se yeard a Gospil, a good news, dis eb'nin' sho. You'se yeard you free, bress de Lawd! I'se been waitin' fer dis news mo' yeahs den I kin reckermember, but dey's come 'fo' my ole haid's under de sod. Hit's all right dat we is glad en sing aloud for joy, but we orter rejice wid trem'lin'. De 'sponsibil'ties ob freedom is des tremenjus. W'at you gwine ter do wid freedom? Does you tink you kin git lazy en thievin' en drunken? Is dere any sech foolishness yere? Will eny man or ooman call deysefs free w'en dey's slabes ter some mean, nasty vice? Sech folks al'ays be slabes, en dey orter be slabes ter a man wid a big whip. See how de young mars'r 'haves dat brung de news ob freedom. He know he juty en he does hit brave. He mek de w'ite sogers he 'mands des toe de mark. We got ter toe a long, wi'te mark. We ain' free ter do foolishness no mo' dan he en he men is. De gret Linkum got he eye on you; de Cap'n ob our salvation got He eye on you. Now I des gib you some 'structions,'' and happy it would have been for the freedmen—for their masters and deliverers also, it may be added—if all had followed Uncle Lusthah's '' 'structions.''

When through with his exhortation the old preacher knelt down on the box which served as his pulpit and offered a fervent petition. From the loud ''amens'' and '' 'lujahs'' he evidently voiced the honest feeling of the hour in his dusky audience. Scoville was visibly affected at the reference to him. ''May de deah Lawd bress de young Linkum ossifer,'' rose Uncle Lusthah's tones, loud, yet with melodious power and pathos, for he was gifted with a voice of unusual compass, developed by his calling. ''He des took he life in he hand en come down in de lan' ob de shadder, de gret, dark shadder dat's been restin' on de hearts ob de slabes. We had no fader, no muder, no wife,

no chile. Dey didn't 'long to we fer dey cud be sole right out'n our arms en we see dem no mo'. De gret shadder ob slav'y swallow dem up. Young mars'r face de bullit, face de so'ed, face de curse ter say we free. May de Lawd be he shiel' en buckler, compass 'im roun' wid angel wings, stop de han' riz ter strike, tu'n away de bullit aim at he heart. May de Lawd brung 'im gray hars at las lak mine, so he see, en his chil'n see, en our chil'n see de 'liverance he hep wrought out.

"En dar's young mistis. She hab a heart ter feel fer de po' slabe. She al'ays look kin' at us, en she stood 'tween us en woun's en death; w'en all was agin us en she in de watehs ob triberlation hersef, she say 'fo' dem all, 'No harm come ter us.' She put her lil w'ite arm roun' her ole mammy." ("Dat she did," cried Aun' Jinkey, who was swaying back and forth where the fire lit up her wrinkled visage, "en de gret red welt on her shol'er now.") "She took de blow," continued Uncle Lusthah, amid groans and loud lamentations, "en de Lawd, wid whose stripes we healed, *will* bress her en hab aready bressed her en brung her 'liverance 'long o' us. May He keep her eyes fum teahs, en her heart fum de breakin' trouble; may He shine on a path dat lead ter all de bes' tings in dis yere worl' en den ter de sweet home ob heb'n!"

When the voice of Uncle Lusthah ceased Scoville heard a low sob from Miss Lou at his side and he was conscious that tears stood in his own eyes. His heart went out in strong homage to the young girl to whom such tribute had been paid and her heart thrilled at the moment as she distinguished his deep "amen" in the strong, general indorsement of the petition in her behalf.

Then rose a hymn which gathered such volume and power that it came back in echoes from distant groves.

"Hark, hark, I year a soun'. Hit come fum far away;
Wake, wake, en year de soun' dat come fum far away.
De night am dark, de night been long, but dar de mawnin' gray;
En wid de light is comin' sweet a soun' fum far away.

"Look how de light am shinin' now across de gret Red Sea.
On Egypt sho' we stay no mo' in slabing misery.
Ole Pharaoh year de voice ob God, 'Des set my people free;'
En now we march wid song en shout, right troo the gret Red Sea."

Every line ended with the rising inflection of more than a hundred voices, followed by a pause in which the echoes repeated clearly the final sound. The effect was weird, strange in the last degree, and, weary as he was, Scoville felt all his nerves tingling.

The meeting now broke up, to be followed by dancing and singing among the younger negroes. Uncle Lusthah, Aun' Jinkey, and many others crowded around Scoville and "the young mistis" to pay their respects. Chunk and Zany, standing near, graciously accepted the honors showered upon them. The officer speedily gave Miss Lou his arm and led her away. When so distant as to be unobserved, he said in strong emphasis, "Miss Baron, I take off my hat to you. Not to a princess would I pay such homage as to the woman who could wake the feeling with which these poor people regard you."

She blushed with the deepest pleasure of her life, for she had been repressed and reprimanded so long that words of encouragement and praise were very sweet. But she only said with a laugh, "Oh, come; don't turn my poor bewildered head any more to-night. I'm desperately anxious to have uncle and aunt think I'm a very mature young woman, but I know better and so do you. Why, even Uncle Lusthah made me cry like a child."

"Well, his words about you brought tears to my eyes, and so there's a pair of us."

"Oh!" she cried delightedly, giving his arm a slight pressure, "I didn't know that you'd own up to that. When I saw them I felt like laughing and crying at the same moment. And so I do now—it's so delicious to be free and happy—to feel that some one is honestly pleased with you."

He looked upon her upturned face, still dewy from emotion, and wondered if the moon that night shone on a fairer

object the world around. It was indeed the face of a glad, happy child no longer depressed by woes a few hours old, nor fearful of what the next hour might bring. Her look into his eyes was also that of a child, full of unbounded trust, now that her full confidence was won. "You do indeed seem like a lovely child, Miss Baron, and old Uncle Lusthah told the whole truth about you. Those simple folk are like children themselves and find people out by intuition. If you were not good-hearted they would know it. Well, I'm glad I'm not old myself."

"But you're going to be old—*awful* old," she replied, full of rippling laughter. "Oh, wasn't I glad to hear Uncle Lusthah pray over you! for if there is a God who takes any care of people, you will live to be as gray as he is."

"If there is a God?"

"Oh, I'm a little heathen. I couldn't stand uncle or aunt's God at all or believe in Him. They made me feel that He existed just to approve of their words and ways, and to help them keep me miserable. When I hear Uncle Lusthah he stirs me all up just as he did to-night; but then I've always been taught that he's too ignorant—well, I don't know. Uncle and aunt made an awful blunder," and here she began to laugh again. "There is quite a large library at the house, at least I suppose it's large, and I read and read till I was on the point of rebellion, before you and Cousin Mad came. Books make some things clear and others *so-o* puzzling. I like to hear you talk, for you seem so decided and you know so much more than I do. Cousin Mad never read much. It was always horse, and dog, and gun with him. How I'm running on and how far I am from your question! But it is such a new thing to have a listener who cares and understands. Aun' Jinkey cares, poor soul! but she can understand so little. Lieutenant, I can answer your implied question in only one way; I wish to know what is true. Do you believe there's a God who cares for us as Uncle Lusthah says?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm glad you do; and simply saying so will have more weight than all arguments."

"Please remember, Miss Baron, I haven't said that I lived up to my faith. It's hard to do this, I suppose, in the army. Still I've no right to any excuses, much less to the unmanly one that it's hard. What if it is? That's a pretty excuse for a soldier. Well, no matter about me, except that I wish you to know that with all my mind and heart I believe that there is a good God taking care of a good girl like you. Pardon me if I ask another question quite foreign. How could your cousin wish to marry you if you do not love him?"

He wondered as he saw the child-like look pass from her face and her brow darken into a frown. "I scarcely know how to answer you," she said, "and I only understand vaguely myself. I understand better, though, since I've known you. When you were hiding in Aun' Jinkey's cabin you looked *goodwill* at me. I saw that you were not thinking of yourself, but of me, and that you wished me well. I feel that Cousin Mad is always thinking of himself, that his professed love of me is a sort of self-love. He gives me the feeling that he wants me for his *own* sake, not for *my* sake at all. I don't believe he'd love me a minute after he got tired of me. I'd be just like the toys he used to cry for, then break up. I won't marry such a man, *never*."

"You had better not. Hush! We are approaching a man yonder who appears anxious to hear what is none of his business."

They had been strolling slowly back, often pausing in the deep mutual interest of their conversation. Miss Lou now detected Perkins standing in the shadow of his dwelling, between the mansion and the quarters.

"That's the overseer," she said, in a low voice. "How quick your eyes are!"

"They must be in my duty." Then he directed their steps so as to pass near the man. When opposite, he turned his eyes suddenly upon Perkins' face, and detected such a

scowl of hostility and hate that his hand dropped instinctively on the butt of his revolver. "Well, sir," he said sternly, "you have shown your disposition."

"You didn't 'spect ter find a friend, I reck'n," was the surly yet confused reply.

"Very well, I know how to treat such bitter enemies as you have shown yourself to be. Officer of the guard!" A trooper ran forward from the camp-fire and saluted. "Put this man with the other prisoners, and see that he has no communication with any one."

As Perkins was marched off they heard him mutter a curse. "Pardon me, Miss Baron," Scoville resumed. "The lives of my men are in my care, and that fellow would murder us all if he had a chance. I don't know that he could do any harm, but it would only be from lack of opportunity. I never take risks that I can help."

"Having seen his expression I can't blame you," was her reply.

A new train of thought was awakened in Scoville. He paused a moment and looked at her earnestly.

"Why do you look at me so?" she asked.

"Miss Baron, pardon me, but I do wish I were going to be here longer, or rather, I wish the war was over. I fear there are deep perplexities, and perhaps dangers, before you. My little force is in the van of a raiding column which will pass rapidly through the country. It will be here to-morrow morning, but gone before night, in all probability. The war will be over soon, I trust, but so much may happen before it is. You inspire in me such deep solicitude. I had to tell those poor negroes that they were free. So they would be if within our lines. But when we are gone that overseer may be brutal, and the slaves may come again to you for protection. That cousin of yours may also come again—oh, it puts me in a sort of rage to think of leaving you so unfriended. You will have to be a woman in very truth, and a brave, circumspect one, too."

"You are right, sir," she replied with dignity, "and you must also remember that I will be a Southern woman. I do feel most friendly to you personally, but not to your cause. Forgive me if I have acted and spoken too much like a child to-night, and do not misunderstand me. Circumstances have brought us together in a strange way, and while I live I shall remember you with respect and gratitude. I can never lose the friendly interest you have inspired, and I can never think of the North as I hear others speak of it; but I belong to my own people, and I should be very unhappy and humiliated if I felt that I must continue to look to an enemy of my country for protection. I cannot go over to your side any more than you can come over to ours."

He merely sighed in answer.

"You do not think less"—and then she paused in troubled silence.

"Louise," called Mrs. Whately's voice.

"Yes," replied the girl, "we are coming."

"I think you will always try to do what seems right to you, Miss Baron. May God help and guide you, for you may have trouble of which you little dream. What you say about your side and my side has no place in my thoughts. I'll help settle such questions with soldiers. Neither do I wish to be officious, but there is something in my very manhood which protests against a fair young girl like you being so beset with troubles."

"Forgive me," she said earnestly. "There it is again. You are unselfishly thinking of me, and that's so new. There's no use of disguising it. When you go there'll not be one left except Aun' Jinkey and Uncle Lusthah who will truly wish what's best for me without regard to themselves. Well, it can't be helped. At least I have had a warning which I won't forget."

"But Mrs. Whately seems so kindly—"

"Hush! I see uncle coming. She would sacrifice herself utterly for her son, and do you think she would spare me?"

Mr. Baron's fears and honest sense of responsibility led him at last to seek his niece. In doing this he saw Perkins under guard. Hastening to Scoville he demanded, "What does this mean? My overseer is not a combatant, sir."

"Mr. Baron," replied the officer, "have you not yet learned that I am in command on this plantation?"

Poor Mr. Baron lost his temper again and exploded most unwisely in the words, "Well, sir, my niece is not under your command. You had no right to take her from the house without my permission. I shall report you to your superior officer to-morrow."

"I hope you will, sir."

"I also protest against the treatment of my overseer."

"Very well, sir."

"You will please release my niece's arm and leave us to ourselves, as you promised."

"No, sir, I shall escort Miss Baron back to Mrs. Whately, from whom I obtained the honor of her society."

"Louise, I command"—Mr. Baron began, almost choking with rage.

"No, uncle," replied the girl, "you *command* me no more. Request me politely, and I will shake hands with Lieutenant Scoville, thank him for his courtesy to me and to us all, and then go with you."

The old man turned on his heel and walked back to the house without a word.

"Bravo!" whispered Scoville, but he felt her hand tremble on his arm. "That's your true course," he added. "Insist on the treatment due your age, act like a lady, and you will be safe."

"Well," Mrs. Whately tried to say politely, "have not you young people taken an ell?"

"No, Mrs. Whately," Scoville replied gravely. "We have not taken a step out of our way between here and the quarters, although we have lingered in conversation. We have ever been in plain sight of many of your people. I

put the overseer under arrest because I had absolute proof of his malicious hostility. I shall inflict no injury on any one who does not threaten to be dangerous to my command, my duty requiring that I draw the line sharply there. Mrs. Whately, I have never met a young lady who inspired in me more honest respect. If we have trespassed on your patience, the blame is mine. Ladies, I thank you for your courtesy and wish you good-night," and he walked rapidly away.

"Aunty," said Miss Lou, "you have begun to treat me in a way which would inspire my love and confidence."

"Well, my dear, I am sorely perplexed. If we yield in minor points, you should in vital ones, and trust to our riper experience and knowledge."

The distractions of the day had practically robbed Mr. Baron of all self-control, and he now exclaimed, "I yield nothing. As your guardian I shall maintain my rights and live up to my sense of responsibility. If by wild, reckless conduct you thwart my efforts in your behalf, my responsibility ceases. I can then feel that I have done my best."

"And so, uncle, you would be quite content, no matter what became of me," added the girl bitterly. "Well, then, I tell you to your face that you cannot marry me, like a slave girl, to whom you please. I'll die first. I shall have my girlhood, and then, as woman, marry or not marry, as I choose. Aunty, I appeal to you, as a woman and a lady, to stop this wretched folly if you can."

"Louise," said her aunt, kindly, "as long as I have a home it shall be a refuge to you. I hope the morrow will bring wiser counsels and better moods to us all."

The mansion soon became quiet, and all slept in the weariness of reaction. No sound came from the darkened dwelling except an occasional groan from one of the wounded men on the piazza. Scoville, wrapped in a blanket, lay down by the fire with his men and was asleep almost instantly. The still shadows on the dewy grass slowly turned

toward the east as the moon sank low. To the last, its beams glinted on the weapons of vigilant sentinels and vedettes, and the only warlike sounds occurred at the relief of guards. All rested who could rest except one—the overseer. Restless, vindictive, he watched and listened till morning.

CHAPTER XVIII

A WELL-AIMED SLIPPER

IT would be hard to imagine a morning more lovely, a more perfect type of peace and good-will, than the one which dawned over The Oaks plantation the following day. With the light came fragrant zephyrs of delicious coolness; the stillness of the night gave place to a slight stir and rustle of foliage; chanticleers crowed lustily, with no forebodings of their doom; the horses began to whinny for their breakfasts, and the negroes to emerge from their quarters to greet the light of this first fair day of freedom. Uncle Lusthah declared "De millenyum yere sho!" Smoke rose from Aun' Jinkey's chimney, and after the pone was baking on the hearth she came out on the doorstep with her pipe to do a little "projeckin'." Even she was impressed with the beauty and peacefulness of the morning. "En ter tink," she ejaculated, "my honey's sleepin' lak a lil chile 'stead ob cryin' en wringin' her han's nobody know whar! W'en dey gits ter mar'in' my honey en she a bleatin' en a tremlin' like a lamb 'long a wolf dat lickin' he chops ober her, den I say hit's time fer a smash up. Marse Scoville look lak he 'tect her gin de hull worl'."

So thought Miss Lou herself. In her weariness and sense of security she had slept soundly till the light grew distinct, when the birds wakened her. With consciousness memory quickly reproduced what had occurred. She sprang to the window and peeped through the blinds in time to see Scoville rise from his bivouac and throw aside his blanket. With a soldier's promptness he aroused his men and began

giving orders, the tenor of one being that a scouting party should prepare to go out immediately.

"Oh!" she sighed, "if I had such a brother what a happy girl I might be! I don't believe I'd ever care to marry."

She was far from being a soft-natured, susceptible girl, and while Scoville kindled her imagination and had won her trust, she did not think of him as a lover. Indeed, the very word had become hateful to her, associating it as she did with her cousin and the idea of selfish appropriation. More strongly than any slave on the plantation, she longed for freedom, and the belief that the Union officer understood her, respecting her rights and feelings, won him all the favor she was then capable of bestowing upon any one. If he had employed his brief opportunity in gallantry and love-making she would have been disgusted. "I never met any one like him," she soliloquized as she hastily dressed. "It's so strange to find one willing I should be a little bit happy in my own way, who is not 'seeking my best welfare,' as uncle says. Welfare, indeed! As if I couldn't see some wish or scheme of their own back of all they say or do! His dark eyes declare, 'I wish you well whether you are useful to me or not.' Well, I am glad I've known him, whether I ever see him again or not. He has made my course much clearer."

The inmates of the mansion as well as those without were soon busy in their preparations for a day which all felt must be eventful. That the "millenyum" had not come was soon proved by the commencement of hostilities on the part of Mrs. Baron and Scoville. The latter was approaching the kitchen to interview Aun' Suke when "ole miss" appeared.

"Madam," he said, lifting his hat, "will you kindly direct your cook to prepare a breakfast immediately for the wounded? It should be light as well as nutritious, for some are feverish."

She paid no more attention to him than if he had not spoken, and entered Aun' Suke's domain. There was a mirthful flash in his dark eyes as he followed her. When

she saw him standing in the doorway, her cold stare, more clearly than words, designated him "intruder." He steadily returned her gaze, and Aun' Suke, who had been shouting over freedom the night before, now had the temerity to quiver in all her vast proportions with amusement.

"Madam," resumed Scoville, removing his hat, "will you give my orders, or shall I?"

"Your orders, sir! and in my kitchen!"

"Certainly, madam, and my orders in this instance are simply the dictates of humanity."

"I will see that our men are well cared for. I am not responsible for the others."

"But I am, and all must fare alike. Cook, prepare a nice light breakfast for all the wounded men before you do anything else."

"Yes, mars'r, I 'bey you, I sut'ny will."

Scoville strode away to attend to other duties. Mrs. Baron glared after him and then at Aun' Suke, who at once began her work.

"Do you mean to say that you'll take no more orders from me?" the old lady asked, in tones of suppressed anger.

"Kyant do mo' 'n one ting ter oncet. Ob co'se I git yo' breakfas' when I kin. Reck'n dough we soon hab ter disergree on my wages. I'se a free ooman."

"Oh, you are free and I am not. That's the new order of things your Yankee friends would bring about."

"La now, misus," said matter-of-fact Aun' Suke, again shaking with mirth at the idea, "you got mo' edication 'n me. W'at de use bein' blin' des on puppose? Spose you en ole mars'r tell me dat ain' a egg" (holding one up): "kyant I see? Hit's broad sun-up. Why not des look at tings ez dey iz? Sabe a heap ob trouble. Yere, you lil niggahs, hep right smart or you neber get yo' breakfas'."

Mrs. Baron went back to the house looking as if the end of the world had come instead of the millennium.

In the hall she met her husband and Mrs. Whately, to

whom she narrated what had occurred. Mr. Baron had settled down into a sort of sullen endurance, and made no answer, but Mrs. Whately began earnestly: "Our very dignity requires that we have no more collisions with a power we cannot resist. Even you, sister, must now see that you gain nothing and change nothing. We can be merely passive in our hostility. The only course possible for us is to endure this ordeal patiently and then win Louise over to our wishes."

Miss Lou, who was dusting the parlor, stole to the further end of the apartment and rattled some ornaments to warn them of her presence. She smiled bitterly as she muttered, "Our wishes; mine will never be consulted."

Mrs. Whately entered the parlor and kissed her niece affectionately. She did not like the girl's expression and the difficulty of her task grew clearer. Nevertheless, her heart was more set on the marriage than ever before, since her motives had been strengthened by thought. That her son was bent upon it was one of the chief considerations. "If I obtain for him this prize," she had reasoned, "he must see that there is no love like a mother's."

Miss Lou, also, had been unconsciously revealing her nature to the sagacious matron, who felt the girl, if won, would not become a pretty toy, soon wearying her son by insipidity of character. "I know better," the lady thought, "than to agree with brother and sister that Louise is merely wilful and perverse." Feeling that she was incapable of controlling her son, she would be glad to delegate this task to the one who had the most influence over him and who best promised to maintain it. She was not so blind in her indulgence as helpless in it from long habit. She thought that as a wife the girl would not only hold her own, but also do much toward restraining her son in his wild tendencies; but she gave no weight to the consideration often in Miss Lou's mind, "I do not see why everything and everybody should exist for Cousin Mad's benefit."

Mrs. Whately secretly approved of Scoville's orders in

regard to the wounded, but did not so express herself, resolving not to come into collision again with her relatives unless it was essential. She now went out and assisted the surgical trooper in dressing the men's injuries. Miss Lou had learned that breakfast would be delayed, and so decided to satisfy her hunger partially at Aun' Jinkey's cabin. The excitements of the preceding day had robbed her of all appetite, but now she was ravenous. Her estrangement from her uncle and aunt was so great that she avoided them, having a good deal of the child's feeling, "I won't speak till they make up first."

The old negress heard her rapid steps and looked out from her door. "Oh, mammy," cried the girl, "I'm that hungry I could almost eat you, and I don't know when we'll have breakfast."

"You des in time, den, honey. Come right in."

But Miss Lou paused at the door in embarrassment, for Scoville had risen from the table and was advancing to meet her. "Good-morning, Miss Baron," he said. "Aunt Jinkey and Chunk have prepared me a capital breakfast, and I should be only too delighted to share it. I must be in the saddle soon and so availed myself of the first chance for a meal. Please do not hesitate, for it will probably be my only opportunity of saying good-by."

"Dar now, honey, sit right down. Ef Marse Scoville ain' quality den I doan know um."

"Miss Baron," cried Scoville, laughing, "Aunt Jinkey has raised a point now which you alone can settle—the question of my quality."

"About the same as my own, I reckon," said the girl, sitting down with rosy cheeks. "Aun' Jinkey is evidently your ally, for she has put her invitation in a form which I could not decline without hurting the feelings of—"

"Your sincere and grateful friend," interrupted the officer.

"Uncle and aunt would think I was committing an unheard-of indiscretion."

"But *are* you?"

"I'm too hungry to discuss the question now," she answered, laughing. "Do let us hasten, for such *old* friends should not part with their mouths full."

"Well, hit des does my ole heart good ter see you sittin' dar, Miss Lou. I'se po'ful glad yo' mouf's full ob breakfas' en dat yo' eyes ain' full ob tears. W'at we projeckin' 'bout yistidy?"

"Now, Aun' Jinkey, just keep still. I can't show becoming sentiment on any subject except pones and such coffee as I have not tasted for a long time."

"Hit Yankee coffee."

"I drink your health in my one contribution," cried Scoville. "Never mind, aunty, we'll be jolly over it all the same. I agree with you. It's worth a month's pay to see Miss Baron happy and hungry. I'd like to know who has a better right. Aunt Jinkey's told me how you protected her. That was fine. You'd make a soldier."

"Oh, please stop such talk, both of you. I'm ridiculously unlike the heroines in uncle's library. Lieutenant, please don't say 'Ha! the hour has come and we must part, perhaps forever.' I won't have any forever. Uncle Lusthah has insured you gray hairs, and if you don't come and see us before they're gray, Aun' Jinkey and I will believe all uncle says about the Yankees."

"And so you ought," said Scoville. "Oh, I'll come back to breakfast with you again, if I have to come on crutches. Well, I must go. There is Chunk with the horses. Even now I'm keeping one ear open for a shot from that hasty cousin of yours."

At this reference she looked grave and rose from the table. "Lieutenant," she said, taking his proffered hand, "please do not think me a giddy child nor an unfeeling girl. I *do* thank you. I do wish you well just as you wish me well—for your own sake. Oh, it seems such a blessed thing for people to feel simple, honest goodwill toward one another, without having some scheme back of it all."

"Well, Miss Baron, if I had a chance I'd soon prove that I too had a scheme. The chief point in it would be to keep all trouble out of the eyes that looked on me so kindly when I came to my senses in this cabin. Heaven bless your good, kind heart! Promise me one thing."

"Well?"

"If your cousin comes soon there may be a sharp fight. Keep out of danger. I could never be myself again if my coming here should result in injury to you."

"As far as my curiosity will permit I will try to keep out of the way. I've seen so little in my short life that I must make the most of this brief opportunity. In a day or so you may all be gone, and then the old humdrum life will begin again."

"Yes, we may all be gone before night. Your chief danger then will be from the stragglers which follow the army like vultures. If possible, I will induce the general to leave a guard to-night. I wish Mr. Baron had a clearer eye to his interests and safety. The general is not lamb-like. If a guard can be procured for to-night it will be due to your action and my representations. My services as a scout have brought me in rather close contact with the general, and possibly I may induce him to give protection as long as the interest of the service permits. All questions will be decided with reference to the main chance; so, if I seem neglectful, remember I must obey my orders, whatever they are. Ah! there's a shot."

Her hand ached long afterward from his quick, strong pressure, and then he mounted and was away at a gallop. Miss Lou hastily returned to the house, but Chunk coolly entered the cabin, saying, "I'se git a bite fer mebbe I ain' yere ter dinner."

"Reck'n you better be skerce, Chunk, ef Mad Whately comes," said his grandmother, trembling.

"I knows des w'at ter 'spect fum Mad Whately en fum dat ar oberseer too, but dey fin' me a uggly ole hornet. I got my sting han'y," and he tapped the butt of a revolver

in the breast of his coat. Having devoured the remnants of the breakfast he darted out and mounted his horse also.

Mad Whately was coming sure enough, and like a whirlwind. He had fallen in with the van of the Confederate advance during the night, and by his representations had induced an early and forced march to The Oaks. The vigilant Scoville, with his experiences as a scout fresh in his mind, had foreseen this possibility. He had two plans in his mind and was ready to act upon either of them.

Rushing through the hallway of the mansion from the rear entrance, Miss Lou found her kindred on the veranda. They were too excited and eager to ask where she had been, for the fierce rebel yell had already been raised at the entrance of the avenue.

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Baron, "now we'll see this Yankee scum swept away."

Apparently he would have good reason for his exultation. Scoville was the last man in the world to fight blindly, and Miss Lou kept her eyes on him. As he sat on his horse, where he commanded the best view of the advancing enemy, she thought he appeared wonderfully quiet. Not so his men. They were galloping to the right of the mansion, where there was a grove on rising ground which formed a long ridge stretching away to the northwest. It can readily be guessed that it was Scoville's aim not to be cut off from the main Union column by a superior force, and the ridge would enable him to see his enemy before he fought, if he should deem it wise to fight at all. He knew that his horses were fresh. If those of the attacking party were somewhat blown he could easily keep out of the way if it were too strong to cope with. He exchanged a few words with the sergeant commanding the scouting party recently sent out, and pointed to the grove with his sabre, then slowly followed with his eye on the enemy.

Miss Lou was in a fever of apprehension in his behalf, for already shots were fired at him from the Confederates. Suddenly she heard the click of a musket lock just beneath

her, and, looking down, saw Perkins levelling a piece at Scoville. Quick as light she drew off her slipper and dashed it into the man's face as he fired. By reason of his disconcerted aim the bullet flew harmlessly by the Union officer, who gave a quick, stern glance toward his assailant, recognized him, and galloped after his men.

"You vile murderer!" cried Miss Lou, "would you shoot a man in his back?"

"Oh, come, Perkins, that's hardly the thing, no matter what your provocation," Mr. Baron added.

Perkins bestowed a malignant glance on Miss Lou, then limped away, wearing a sullen look. The officer in command of the Confederates sheered off across the lawn toward the grove, and the girl quickly saw that his force greatly outnumbered that of Scoville. Mad Whately dashed up to the piazza steps and asked breathlessly, "Are you all safe?"

"Yes," cried his mother. "Thank God! I see you are safe also."

He turned his eyes on his cousin, but in her cold, steady gaze found no encouragement. With something like an oath, he turned and galloped after the attacking force.

But Scoville did not wait to be attacked. He continued with his men along the ridge, retreating rapidly when pressed, pausing when pursuit slackened. The officer in command soon remarked to Whately, "We are using up our horses to no purpose, and we shall need them for more important work later in the day."

Therefore he sounded recall and retired on the mansion, Scoville following, thus proving that he was governed by other motives than fear. Indeed, he was in a very genial frame of mind. He had got all his men off safely, except two or three laggards, and had already sent swift riders to inform his general of the situation. Knowing that the tables would soon be turned, he was quite content that he had not made an obstinate and useless resistance. "What's more," he thought, "Miss Lou would not have kept out of danger. It isn't in her nature to do so. Miss Lou! I wish

I might call her that some day and then drop the Miss. One thing is clear. If I meet that cousin again, he'll show me no quarter. So I must look out for him and that assassin of an overseer, too. She called him by his right name, the brave little girl! No need of asking me to come back, for I'd go to the ends of the earth to see her again."

If he had know how her presence of mind and swift action had in all probability saved his life, his feelings would have been far more vivid, while his belief in the luck of throwing an old shoe would have become one of the tenets of his faith. Miss Lou went after the extemporized missile and put it on again, saying, "I have fired my first and last shot in this war."

"It is indeed becoming doubtful on which side you are," answered her uncle sternly.

"I'm not on the side of that wretch Perkins. Suppose he had succeeded, and Lieutenant Scoville's general came here, what mercy could we expect? If Perkins values his life he had better not be caught."

"I am glad indeed, Louise, that you prevented such a thing from happening," said Mrs. Whately. "The result might have been very disastrous, and in any event would have been horrible. It was a brave, sensible thing to do, and you will find that Madison will think so, too."

Mad Whately, however, was in anything but a judicial mood.

CHAPTER XIX

A GIRL'S APPEAL

MISS LOU was too well acquainted with her cousin not to recognize evidences of almost ungovernable rage during the brief moment he had paused at the veranda. She looked significantly at his mother, whose face was pale and full of an apprehension now uncalled for, since the prospect of an immediate battle had passed away. "She is afraid of him herself, her own son, and yet she would marry me to him," the girl thought bitterly.

Miss Lou was mistaken. Her aunt had fears only *for* her son, knowing how prone he was to rash, headlong action when almost insane from passion. The girl, however, was elated and careless. She justly exulted in the act by which she had baffled the vengeance of Perkins, and she had ceased to have the anxieties of a bitter Southern partisan. Such she would have been but for her alienation from those identified with the cause. She was capable of the most devoted loyalty, but to whom should she give it? If a loving father or brother had been among the Confederates, there would have been no question. Now she was sorely perplexed in her feelings, for the South was represented by those bent upon doing her a wrong at which her very soul revolted, and the North by one who had satisfied her sense of right and justice, who, more than all, had warmed her heart by kindness. The very friendliness of the negroes inclined her to take their part almost involuntarily, so deep was the craving of her chilled nature for sympathy. If she had been brought up in loving dependence she would not have been so well equipped for the

chaotic emergency. Having no hope of good counsel from natural advisers, she did not waste a moment in seeking it, or weakly hesitate for its lack. What her bright, active mind suggested as right and best, that she was ready to do instantly. Now that she had gained freedom she would keep it at all hazards.

When the Confederate officers approached the house, she was glad to observe that her cousin was not chief in command.

Mr. Baron went down upon the lawn to meet the officers, and, after a brief parley, Major Brockton, the senior in command, began to dispose of his men for a little rest and refreshment, promising to join the family soon in the dining-room. Miss Lou, unasked, now aided in the preparations for the morning meal. Fearing Aun' Suke would get herself in trouble, she ran to the kitchen and told the old cook to comply with all demands as best she could. She had scarcely spoken when Mrs. Baron entered. Casting a severe look on her niece, she asked Aun' Suke, "Will you obey me now? Will you tell me you are a free woman now?"

"My haid in a whirl aready, misus. Ef you wants me ter I kin cook, but I kyant keep track ob de goin's on."

"I can," replied the indomitable old lady, "and I can keep a good memory of the behavior of all on the plantation."

"You can't govern much longer by fear, aunt," said Miss Lou. "Had you not better try a little kindness?"

"What has been the result of all the years of kindness bestowed upon you?" was the indignant answer.

"I only meant that it might be well to bestow a little of what other people regard as kindness. I had asked Aun' Suke to do her best and am sure she will."

"It will be strange if she does, when you are setting the example of doing your worst. But I am mistress once more, and wish no interference."

"Doan you worry, honey, 'bout we uns," said Aun' Suke

quietly. "We yeard de soun' fum far away, en we year it agin soon."

Meanwhile Mad Whately was closeted with his uncle and mother, listening with a black frown to all that had occurred.

"I tell you," exclaimed the young man, "it's as clear as the sun in the sky that she should be sent away at once—in fact, that you all should go."

"I won't go," said Mr. Baron, "neither will my wife. If the country has come to such a pass that we must die on our hearths we will die right here."

"Then with my whole authority, mother, I demand that you and my cousin go at once while opportunity still remains. The forces on both sides are concentrating here, and this house may soon be in the midst of a battle. Lou will be exposed to every chance of war. By Heaven! the girl to be my wife shall not trifle with me longer. Oh, mother! how could you let her walk and talk alone with that Yankee officer?"

"I tell you both you are taking the wrong course with Louise," began Mrs. Whately.

"You never spoke a truer word, auntie," said Miss Lou, entering.

Stung to the quick, Whately sprang up and said sternly, "In this emergency I am the head of my family. I command you to be ready within an hour to go away with my mother. Perkins and a small guard will go with you to my cousin's house."

"Go away with that cowardly wretch, Perkins? Never!"

"You are to go away with your aunt and my mother, and you cannot help yourself. Your readiness to receive attentions from a miserable Yankee cub shows how little you are to be trusted. I tell you for the honor of our house you *shall* go away. I'd shoot you rather than have it occur again."

"You silly, spoiled, passionate boy!" exclaimed Miss Lou, rendered self-possessed by the very extravagance of

her cousin's anger. "Do you suppose I will take either command or counsel from one who is beside himself? Come, Cousin Mad, cool off, or you'll have some more repenting at leisure to do."

She walked quietly out of the room to the veranda just as Major Brockton was about to announce himself.

"Miss Baron, I presume," he said, doffing his hat.

"Yes, sir. Please sit down. I think we shall soon be summoned to breakfast. If the worst comes to the worst," she resolved, "I can appeal to this officer for protection."

"Mother," said Whately in a choking voice, "be ready to go the moment you have your breakfast."

His passion was so terrible that she made a feint of obeying, while he rushed out of the rear door. Perkins readily entered into the plan, and gave Whately further distorted information about Miss Lou's recent interview with Scoville. Mrs. Whately's horses were quickly harnessed to her carriage, and Perkins drove it near to the back entrance to the mansion.

As Whately entered, his mother put her hand on his arm, and warned, "Madison, I fear you are all wrong—"

"Mother, I will be obeyed at once. The carriage is ready. My own men, who have been paroled, will act as escort. Lou shall go if taken by force."

"Madison, what can you hope from a wife won by such violence?"

"She will fear and obey me the rest of her life. I'd rather die ten thousand deaths than be balked after what she has said. Come, let's go through the form of breakfast and then I shall act."

They found Miss Lou with her uncle, aunt, and Major Brockton already at the table. The major at once resumed his condolences. "I am very sorry indeed," he said, "that you ladies are compelled to leave your home."

"Do you think it wisest and best that we should?" asked Mrs. Whately quickly, hoping that her niece would feel the force of the older officer's decision.

"Yes, madam, I do. I think that the sooner you all are south of our advance the better. It is possible that a battle may take place on this very ground, although I hope not. As soon as my men have had something to eat I shall follow the Yankees, a course I trust that will bring on the action elsewhere; but this region will probably become one of strife and turmoil for a time. It won't last long, however, and if the house is spared I think you can soon return."

Mrs. Baron poured the coffee and then excused herself. A few moments later Miss Lou, who was very observant, noted a significant glance from Zany. As the dusky waitress started ostensibly for the kitchen, the young girl immediately followed. Whately hesitated a moment or two, then left the breakfast room also. But Zany had had time to whisper:

"Oh, Miss Lou, Miss Whately's keridge's at de do', en Perkins en sogers wid it. Ole miss in yo' room en—"

"Quit that," said Whately in a low, stern voice, and Zany scuttled away.

"Now, then," resumed Whately to his cousin, "if you have any dignity or sense left, get ready at once. I can tell you that I'm far past being trifled with now."

"I'll finish my breakfast first, if you please," was the quiet response, so quiet that he was misled, and imagined her will breaking before his purpose.

They were scarcely seated at the table again before she startled them all by saying, "Major Brockton, I appeal to you, as a Southern gentleman and a Southern officer, for protection."

"Why, Miss Baron!" exclaimed the major, "you fairly take away my breath."

"Little wonder, sir. I have had mine taken away."

"Louise, you are insane!" cried Mr. Baron, starting up.

"Major, you can see for yourself that I am not insane, that I have perfect self-control. As you are a true man I plead with you not to let my cousin send me away. He can only do so by force, but I plead with you not to permit it.

If I must I will tell you all, but I'd rather not. I am an orphan and so have sacred claims on every true man, and I appeal to you. I do not fear any battle that may be fought here, but I do fear being sent away, and with good reason."

"Oh, Louise!" cried Mrs. Whately, with scarlet face, "you place us in a horrible position."

"Not in so horrible a one as I have been placed, and which I will not risk again, God is my witness."

Major Brockton looked very grave, for he was acquainted with Whately's recklessness. The young man himself was simply speechless from rage, but Mr. Baron sprang up and said sternly, "You shall hear the whole truth, sir. It can be quickly told, and then you can judge whether I, as guardian, am capable of countenancing anything unwarranted by the highest sense of honor. This girl, my niece, has been virtually betrothed to her cousin since childhood. I and her aunts deemed it wisest and safest, in view of dangers threatening the direst evils, that she should be married at once and escorted by my sister and her son to the house of a relative residing further south. First and last, we were considering her interests, and above all, her safety. That's all."

"No, it is not all," cried Miss Lou, with a passionate pathos in her voice which touched the major's heart. "Would you, sir, force a girl, scarcely more than a child, to marry a man when you knew that she would rather die first? Safety! What would I care for safety after the worst had happened? I will not be married like a slave girl. I will not go away to Lieutenant Whately's relations unless I am taken by force."

"Great God, sir, that I should hear a Southern girl make such an appeal," said Major Brockton, his face dark with indignation. "We are justly proud of the respect we show to our women, and who more entitled to respect than this orphan girl, scarcely more than a child, as she says herself? Good Heaven! Whately, could you not have protected your cousin as you would your sister? You say, sir" (to

Mr. Baron) "that she was betrothed from childhood. She didn't betroth herself in childhood, did she? Believe me, Miss Baron, no one has the power to force you into marriage, although your kindred should use all means, while you are so young, to prevent an unworthy alliance."

"I had no thought of marriage, sir, until terrified by my cousin's purpose and my family's urgency but a day since. I am willing to pay them all respect and deference if they will treat me as if I had some rights and feelings of my own. My only wish is a little of the freedom which I feel a girl should enjoy when as old as I am. I detest and fear the man whom my cousin has selected to take me away. I do not fear a battle. They all can tell you that I stood on the piazza when bullets were flying. I only ask and plead that I may stay in such a home as I have. My old mammy is here and—"

"Well," ejaculated the major, "have you no stronger tie than that of a slave mammy in your home?"

"I do not wish to be unjust, sir. I try to think my aunt and uncle mean well by me, but they can't seem to realize that I have any rights whatever. As for my cousin, he has always had what he wanted, and now he wants me."

"That is natural enough; but let him win you, if he can, like a Southern gentleman. Lieutenant Whately, I order you to your duty. Mr. Baron, if you wish to send your ladies away and go with them, I will furnish an escort. Any Southern home beyond the field of hostilities will be open to you. Acquaint me with your decision," and he bowed and strode away.

Even the most prejudiced and blind are compelled at times by an unhesitating and impartial opinion to see things somewhat in their true light. Long-cherished purposes and habits of thought in regard to Miss Lou, then panic, and strong emotions mixed with good and evil, had brought the girl's relatives into their present false relations to her. After the scene at the attempted wedding, Mrs. Whately would have returned to safe and proper ground, hoping

still to win by kindness and coaxing. She had learned that Miss Lou was not that kind of girl, who more or less reluctantly could be urged into marriage and then make the best of it as a matter of course. This fact only made her the more eager for the union, because by means of it she hoped to secure a balance-wheel for her son. But the blind, obstinate persistence on the part of the Barons in their habitual attitude toward their niece, and now her son's action, had placed them all in a most humiliating light. Even Mr. Baron, who had always been so infallible in his autocratic ways and beliefs, knew not how to answer the elderly major. Whately himself, in a revulsion of feeling common to his nature, felt that his cousin had been right, and that a miserable space for repentance was before him, not so much for the wrong he had purposed, as for the woful unwisdom of his tactics and their ignominious failure. His training as a soldier led him to obey without a word.

Miss Lou was magnanimous in her victory. "Cousin Madison," she said earnestly, "why don't you end this wicked nonsense and act like a cousin? As such I have no ill-will toward you, but I think you and uncle must now see I'll stop at nothing that will keep me from becoming your wife. There's no use of trying to make me think I'm wrong in my feelings, for I now believe every true man would side with me. Be my cousin and friend and I will give you my hand here and now in goodwill."

But his anger was too strong to permit any such sensible action, and he rushed away without a word.

"Madison!" called his mother. "Oh, I'm just overwhelmed," and she covered her face with her hands and burst into tears.

"Well," said Mr. Baron in a sort of dreary apathy, "do you and Louise wish to go away under an escort furnished by the major?"

"No," cried Mrs. Whately, "I would accept my fate rather than favor at his hands. If I could only explain

to him more fully—yet how can I? My son, with all his faults, is all I have to live for. I shall stay near him while I can, for he will be reckless to-day. My heart is just breaking with forebodings. Oh, why couldn't you, with your gray hairs, have shown a little wisdom in helping me restrain him?"

"I reckon the restraining should have been practiced long ago," replied her brother irritably.

"You have practiced nothing but restraint in the case of Louise, and what is the result?"

The girl looked at them wonderingly in their abject helplessness, and then said, "If you are taking it for granted that I am spoiled beyond remedy, I can't help it. I would have made no trouble if you had not set about making me trouble without end. As soon as I can I'll go away and take care of myself."

"Of course, Louise," said Mrs. Whately, "we're all wrong, you as well as the rest of us. We must try to get this snarl untangled and begin right. The idea of your going away!"

"I supposed that was the only idea," said Mrs. Baron, entering. "I, at least, have tried to remedy our niece's perverseness by getting her things ready."

Mrs. Whately wrung her hands in something like despair, while Miss Lou burst into a peal of half-nervous laughter at the expression on her uncle's face. "Well," she said, "there'll be no more trouble as far as I am concerned unless it's of your own making. If I am protected in my home, I shall stay; if not, I shall leave it. One learns fast in such ordeals as I have passed through. Aunt Sarah, your son threatened to shoot me for doing what you permitted. Suppose I had told Major Brockton that? I made allowances for Madison's passion, but unless he learns to control himself he will have to vent his passion on some one else."

"She has just lost her senses," gasped Mrs. Baron.

"No, we have acted as if we had lost ours," said Mrs.

Whately rising with dignity. "I can't reason with either of you any more, for you have made up your minds that a spade is not a spade. I shall tell my niece that hereafter I shall treat her kindly and rationally, and then go home," and she left husband and wife confronting each other.

"What are you going to do?" asked the wife.

"Do!" exploded the husband in desperation, "why, hump myself and restore everything in a twinkling as it was five years ago. What else can I do?"

Even Mrs. Baron was speechless at this admission that events had now passed far beyond his control.

CHAPTER XX

SCOVILLE'S HOPE

MRS. WHATELY found her niece on the veranda watching the proceedings without, and she lost no time in expressing her purpose. To her surprise, a pair of arms were around her neck instantly, and a kiss was pressed upon her lips.

"That's my answer," said Miss Lou, who was as ready to forgive and forget as a child. "If you say a word about going home I shall be unhappy. See, auntie, the Yankees are retreating again as our men advance."

The morning sun was now shining brightly and the day growing very warm. Before them was the scene of military operations. At present, it afforded a deeply exciting spectacle, yet oppressed with no sense of personal danger. Scoville's little force was slowly retiring along the ridge which the Confederates were approaching, thus removing the theatre of actual conflict from the vicinity of the dwelling.

Mr. Baron appeared on the veranda and soon began to yield to the soothing influences of his pipe. It was not in his nature to make any formal acknowledgments of error, but he felt that he had gone on the wrong track far and long enough, and so was ready for a gradual amelioration in his relations to his niece and sister. They had become too absorbed in the scene before them to think of much else, while Mrs. Baron sought composure and solace in her domestic affairs.

At last Mrs. Whately said, "The Yankees appear to have stopped retreating and to be increasing in numbers.

Alas! I fear our men are in great danger and that the main column of the enemy is near."

There was a sudden outbreak of cries and exclamations from the negroes in the rear of the mansion. Zany rushed out, saying, "De Yanks comin' by Aun' Jinkey's cabin."

She had scarcely spoken before they heard a rush of trampling steeds and the head of a Union column swept round the house. Miss Lou saw Scoville leading and knew that he had availed himself of his acquaintance with the place to guide an attack upon the Confederates in their rear. He saluted her with his sabre and smiled as he passed, but her sympathies were with the major, now taken at such disadvantage. At this period the troops on both sides were veterans, and neither fought nor ran away without good reason. Major Brockton knew as well what to do as had Scoville before him, and retreated at a gallop with his men toward the southwest, whence his supports were advancing. The Union attack, however, had been something of a surprise and a number of the Confederates were cut off.

The scene and event had been one to set every nerve tingling. But a few yards away the Union force had rushed by like a living torrent, the ground trembling under the iron tread of the horses. Far more impressive had been the near vision of the fierce, bronzed faces of the troopers, their eyes gleaming like their sabres, with the excitement of battle. Scoville won her admiration unstintedly, even though she deprecated his purpose. His bearing was so fearless, so jaunty even in its power, that he seemed as brave as any knight in the old-fashioned romances she had read, yet so real and genial that it was hard to believe he was facing death that sunny morning or bent upon inflicting it. Looking at his young, smiling, care-free face, one could easily imagine that he was taking part in a military pageant; but the headlong career and flashing weapons of his men, who deployed as they charged straight at the Confederates, dispelled any such illusion.

The ridge began to grow black with Union men and Miss

Lou soon perceived the gleam of artillery as the guns were placed in position. Mr. Baron, who had permitted his pipe to go out in the excitement, groaned, "The Yanks have come in force and are forming a line of battle yonder. If our troops come up, the fight will take place on my land. Lord help us! What's coming next?"

Miss Lou began to receive impressions which filled her with awe. Heretofore she had been intensely excited by what had been mere skirmishes, but now she witnessed preparations for a battle. That long line of dark blue on the ridge portended something more terrible than she could imagine. The sounds of conflict died away down the main road, the ring of axes was heard in the grove which crowned the ridge near the mansion, and Mr. Baron groaned again. Thin curls of smoke began to define the Union position—before noon thousands of coffee-pots were simmering on the fires.

At last, a tall man, followed by a little group of officers and a squadron of cavalry, rode down the ridge toward the mansion. These troopers surrounded the house, forming one circle near and another much further away, so that none could approach without causing prompt alarm. The group of officers dismounted and orderlies held their horses. As the tall man came up the veranda steps Miss Lou saw two white stars on his shoulder. Then her uncle advanced reluctantly and this man said, "Mr. Baron, I presume?"

"Yes, sir."

"My name is Marston, commanding officer. This is my staff. Will you oblige us by as good a meal as can be provided hastily? I will pay for it."

"No, sir, you cannot pay for it," replied Mr. Baron indignantly. "I keep a house of entertainment only for my friends. At the same time I know your request is equivalent to a command, and we will do the best we can."

"Very well, sir. I can repay you in a way that will be satisfactory to my mind and be more advantageous to you. Hartly, tell the officer in command to permit no depreda-

tions. Ladies, your servant," and the general dropped into a chair as if weary.

Some of the younger officers promptly sought to play the agreeable to Mrs. Whately and her niece, and upon the latter all eyes rested in undisguised admiration. Cold and shy as she had appeared, she had not failed to note the fact. The woman was sufficiently developed within her for this, and the quick, unanimous verdict of these strangers and enemies in regard to herself which she read in their eyes came with almost the force of a revelation. For the first time, she truly became conscious of her beauty and its power. More than ever, she exulted in her escape and freedom, thinking, "What a poor figure is Cousin Mad beside these men whose faces are so full of intelligence!"

Mrs. Whately was the perfection of dignified courtesy, but quickly excused herself and niece on the plea of hastening preparations. She was one who could not extend even enforced hospitality bereft of its grace, and she also explained to Miss Lou, "We had much better gain their good-will than their ill-will."

"Well, auntie, we must admit that the Yankees have not acted like monsters yet."

The lady bit her lip, but said after a moment, "I suppose gentlemen are much the same the world over. Thus far it has been our good-fortune to have met with such only. There is another class, however, from which God defend us!"

"Lieutenant Scoville admitted that himself. So there is on our side—men like Perkins."

"No, I mean Yankee officers who have at least permitted the worst wrongs in many parts of our unhappy land."

"Well," thought Miss Lou, as she helped Zany set the table, "after my experience I shall believe what I see. What's more, I mean to see the world before I die and judge of everything for myself. Now if the general on our side, with his staff, will only come to supper, I shall get quite an education in one day."

Mrs. Baron retired to her room and would have nothing whatever to do with her present guests, but Aun' Suke did not need her orders now, nor did any of her assistants.

Chunk had again returned to his haunts and had made havoc in the poultry-yard. Now he worked like a beaver, meantime enjoining Aun' Suke "ter sabe de plumpest chicken ob de lot fer my Boss. Marse Scoville brung 'em all yere, you knows. Hi! but we uns had ter git out sud'n dough dis mawnin'."

"Does you tink de Linkum men git druv off agin?"

"How you talks! Aun' Suke. Hi! Druv off! Why, de ridge des black wid um—anuff ter eat Mad Whately en all he men alibe. Dey des ridin' troo de kintry freein' we uns."

"Well, I hopes I kin stay free till night, anyhow," said Aun' Suke, pausing in her work to make a dab at a little darky with her wooden spoon sceptre. "Firs' Marse Scoville whirl in en say I free; den old miss whirl in en say I ain'; now comes de gin'ral ob de hull lot en I'se free agin. W'at's mo', de freer I git de harder I has ter wuk. My haid gwine roun' lak dat ar brass rewster on de barn, wen' de win' blow norf en souf ter oncet."

"No mattah 'bout yo' haid, Aun' Suke. Dat ain' no 'count. Hit's yo' han's dat de gin'ral want busy."

"No mattah 'bout my haid, eh? Tek dat on yo'n den," and she cracked Chunk's skull sharply.

"Dat's right, Aun' Suke, keep de flies away," remarked Chunk quietly. "You git all de freedom you wants ef you does ez I sez."

"Mo'n I wants ef I've got ter min' ev'ybody, eben dem w'at's neber growed up."

"I des step ter de gin'ral en say you hab dejections 'bout cookin' he dinner. Den I tell 'im ter order out a char'ot ter tek you ter glory."

"G'lang! imperdence," said Aun' Suke, resuming her duties.

"La! Aun' Suke," spoke up Zany, who had been listen-

ing for a moment, "doan yer know Chunk de boss ob de hull bizness? He des pickin' chickens now ter let de gen-'ral res' a while. Bimeby he git on he hoss en lead de hull Linkum army wid yo' wooden spoon."

Chunk started for her, but the fleet-footed girl was soon back in the dining-room.

When the early dinner was almost ready Mr. Baron said to his sister:

"Surely, there's no reason why you and Louise should appear."

"Very good reason, brother. I shall make these Northern officers feel that they have eaten salt with us and so are bound to give us their protection. Moreover, I wish to gain every particle of information that I can. It may be useful to our general when he appears. Bring out your wine and brandy, for they loosen tongues."

It soon became evident, however, that General Marston and his staff felt in no need of Dutch courage, and were too plainly aware of their situation to confuse their minds with their host's liquor even if they were so inclined. The general was serious, somewhat preoccupied, but courteous, especially to Miss Lou, on whom his eyes often rested kindly. At last he said:

"I have a little girl at home about your age and with your blue eyes. I'd give a good deal to see her to-day."

"I think, sir, you are glad that she is not where I am to-day," Miss Lou ventured to answer.

"Yes, that's true. I hope no harm will come to you, my child, nor will there if we can help it. I know what claims you have upon us and would be proud indeed if my daughter would behave as you have in like circumstances. I have travelled the world over, Mrs. Whately, and have never seen the equal of the unperverted American girl."

"I certainly believe that true of Southern girls, general," was the matron's reply, although she flushed under a consciousness of all that Scoville might have reported.

"Pardon me, madam, but you are in danger of pervert-

ing the minds of Southern girls with prejudice, a noble kind of prejudice, I admit, because so closely allied with what they regard as patriotism, but narrow and narrowing nevertheless. That old flag yonder means one people, one broad country, and all equally free under the law to think and act."

"Do you intend to remain in this country and hold it in subjection?" Mrs. Whately asked in smiling keenness.

"We intend to give the Southern people every chance to become loyal, madam, and for one I rest confidently in their intelligence and sober second thoughts. They have fought bravely for their ideas, but will be defeated. The end is drawing near, I think."

"Well, sir," said Mr. Baron grimly, "I am sorry you are preparing for some more bloody arguments about our very ears."

"I am also, on account of these ladies; in other respects, I am not. By night there may be many wounded and dying men. It will be well for them that they do not fall in a wild and desolate region like some that we have passed through. As you say, sir, war is an argument, a heated one at times. But a wounded man is an appeal to all kindly humanity. You would nurse me a little, Miss Baron, if I were brought in wounded, would you not?"

"Yes, sir, I would, because I feel what you say about a wounded man is true."

"Oh, I know that," he replied with a very kindly smile. "I hope to tell my little girl about you." Suddenly he became grave again and said, "Mr. Baron, you are somewhat isolated here, and may not be so well informed as I am. However the prospective conflict may turn, I cannot remain in this region. Many of our wounded may be left. Do not delude yourself, sir, nor, if you can help it, permit your friends to be deluded by the belief, or even hope, that our forces will not soon control this and all other parts of the land. While I trust that humanity will lead to every effort to assuage suffering and save life, I must also warn you that

strict inquisition will soon be made. There is nothing that we resent more bitterly than wrongs to or neglect of such of our wounded as must be left behind."

"It would seem, sir, that you hold me responsible for evils which I cannot prevent."

"No, sir. I only suggest that you employ your whole influence and power to avert future evils. I am offering a word to the wise, I trust. Ah, Scoville, you have news?"

"Yes, sir, important," said that officer, standing dusty and begrimed at the doorway.

"Is there haste? Is your information for my ear only? I'm nearly through."

"Plenty of time for dinner, sir. No harm can now come from hearing at once what I have to say."

"Go ahead, then. I'd like my staff to know."

"Well, sir, having got the enemy on the run, we kept them going so they could not mask what was behind them. There's a large force coming up."

"As large as ours?"

"I think so. I gained an eminence from which I obtained a good view. Major Jones told me to say that he would skirmish with the advance, delay it, and send word from time to time."

"All right. Get some dinner, then report to me."

"Yes, sir;" and Scoville saluted and departed without a glance at any one except his commander.

"What do you think of my scout, Miss Baron?" asked the general with a humorous twinkle in his eyes.

"He proved himself a gentleman last evening, sir, and now I should think he was proving a very good soldier, much too good for our interests."

"You are mistaken about your interests. Don't you think he was rather rude in not acknowledging your presence?"

"I don't know much about military matters, but I reckon he thought he was on duty."

The general laughed. "Well," he remarked, "it does not seem to be age that makes us wise so much as eyes that

see and a brain back of them. Scoville is a gentleman and a good soldier. He is also unusually well educated and thoughtful for his years. You are right, my dear. Pardon me, but you keep reminding me of my daughter, and I like to think of all that's good and gentle before a battle."

"I wish I could meet her," said Miss Lou simply.

"Come and visit her after the war, then," said the general cordially. "The hope of the country is in the young people, who are capable of receiving new and large ideas." Having made his acknowledgments to Mr. Baron and Mrs. Whately, he repaired to the veranda and lighted a cigar. The staff-officers, who had tried to make themselves agreeable on general principles, also retired.

Miss Lou's cheeks were burning with an excitement even greater than that which the conflicts witnessed had inspired —the excitement of listening to voices from the great unknown world. "These courteous gentlemen," she thought, "this dignified general who invites me to visit his daughter, are the vandals against whom I have been warned. They have not only treated me like a lady, but have made me feel that I was one, yet to escape them I was to become the slave of a spoiled, passionate boy!"

Mrs. Whately guessed much that was passing in her mind, and sighed deeply.

At the veranda steps stood Uncle Lusthah, hat in hand and heading a delegation from the quarters. The general said, "Wait a moment," then despatched one of his staff to the ridge with orders. "Now, my man."

Uncle Lusthah bowed profoundly and began, "De young Linkum ossifer said, las' night, how you tell us mo' dis mawnin' 'bout our freedom."

"You are free. Mr. Lincoln's proclamation makes you all free."

"Kin we uns go 'long wid you, mars'r? Folks des seem kiner deef 'bout dat ar prockermation in dese parts."

"No, my man, you can't go with us. We are marching much too rapidly for you to keep up. Stay here where you

are known. Make terms with your master for wages or share in the crops. If it is necessary, the people about here will probably soon again hear the proclamation from our cannon. Mr. Baron, why don't you gain the goodwill of those people and secure their co-operation? They will be worth more to you as freemen, and they *are* free. I give you friendly advice. Accept what you can't help. Adapt yourselves to the new order of things. Any other course will be just as futile as to resolve solemnly that you will have nothing to do with steam, but travel as they did in Abraham's time."

Miss Lou looked at her uncle curiously to see how he would take this advice. His coldness of manner and silence told how utterly lost upon him it was. The general looked at him a moment, and then said gravely, "Mr. Baron, such men as you are the enemies of your section, not such men as I. Good-morning, sir. Good-by, my child. Heaven bless and protect you!" With a stately bow to Mrs. Whately he departed and was soon on the ridge again with his men.

"I wonder if Abraham and the Patriarchs would have been any more ready for the new order of things than uncle?" Miss Lou thought as she went to find Scoville.

"He down at Aun' Jinkey's cabin. Chunk took he dinner dar," Zany whispered.

"He des step ter de run ter wash he han's en face," said Aun' Jinkey a little later.

Passing some screening shrubbery, the girl saw him standing on the spot from which he had been carried insensible by her directions so brief a time before. "Your dinner is ready," she called.

He came to her quickly and said, "I've been trying to realize all that has happened since I fell at your feet yonder."

"Far more has happened to me than to you," she replied. "It seems years since then; I've seen and learned so much."

"I wish to ask you something," he said earnestly.

"That scamp, Perkins, fired on me at close range. You stood just over him and I heard what you said. How happened it that his bullet flew so wide of the mark?"

She began laughing as she asked, "Have you never heard that there was luck in throwing an old shoe? I hit Perkins over the eyes with one of mine."

"Took it off and fired it while he was trying to shoot me?"

"Yes."

He seized both her hands and asked, "What will you take for that shoe?"

"What a Yankee you are to ask such a question! It wasn't a shoe; it was a slipper."

"Have you it on now?"

"Yes. What should you want of it?"

"I want to wear it next my heart. Which one was it? Let me see it."

"No; it's old. I haven't any other, and I shall wear it on my right foot as long as it lasts."

"Please let me see it and take it in my hands just a moment. I may never have a chance to ask another favor of you."

"Oh, yes, you will. You are coming to see us, and the general has asked me to visit his daughter after the war is over. Do you think he'll remember it?"

"The slipper, please."

"How can you ask so absurd a thing?" and a dainty foot was put out a brief instant before him.

"Oh, you little Cinderella! I wish I was the Prince." He saw something like a frown gathering on her face. "Don't look that way," he resumed, "I want to tell you something I've read. I don't remember the words, but the gist is that a woman never forgets a man on whom she has bestowed a great kindness. Already I have twice owed my life to you. You can't forget me. My hope is in what you have done for me, not what I can do for you. I can think of myself lying dead in front of the house, I know I

am standing here looking into your true, sweet eyes. Let me look into them a moment, for I have no sister, no mother, no one in the world that I care for like you. Do not think I am making love. I may be dead yet before night. But whether I live or die I want you to remember that there is one human soul that always wishes you well for your *own* sake, that is wholly and unselfishly devoted to your interests and happiness."

"There, I'm beginning to cry, and your dinner's getting cold. You must stop talking so."

"Give me something to carry into battle this afternoon."

She stooped and gathered some wild violets. "There," she said.

"You could not have chosen better. Whenever I see violets hereafter they shall be your eyes looking at me as you are looking now."

"And—well—you can remember that there is always a little friend in the South who does care. That's a curious thought about a woman's caring for those she has—I don't believe a woman can care for any one and not try to do something for him. Let us just think of ourselves as friends. It seems to me that I never want to think any other way. Now you *must* get your dinner. You may be summoned hastily and have no other chance to-day. After Uncle Lusthah's words last night I'm not going to have any forebodings."

"Won't you let me call you Miss Lou once before I go?"

"Why not?"

"Well, then, Miss Lou, look in my eyes once more and remember what you see there. I won't say a word."

She raised hers shyly to his, blushed deeply and turned away, shaking her head. The power to divine what she saw was born with her.

"Yes, I understand you," he said very gently, "but you can't help it, any more than the sun's shining. Some day your heart may be cold and sad, and the memory of what you have just seen may warm and cheer it. Miss Lou, you

brave, noble little child-woman, didn't you see that my love was your servant—that it merely gives you power over me? Even as my wife you would be as free as I would be. Now good-by. We part here and not before others. Chunk is yonder with my horse. Be just as happy as you can whether we ever meet again or not."

"Then—then—if you don't come again?" she faltered.

"I shall be dead, but don't believe this too hastily."

"You've been kind," she burst out passionately, "you've treated me with respect, as if I had a right to myself. You have saved me from what I dreaded far worse than death. You shall not go away, perhaps to die, without—without—without—oh, think of me only as a grateful child whose life you've kept from being spoiled."

"I shall not go away without—what?" he asked eagerly.

"Oh, I don't know. What shall I say? My heart aches as if it would break at the thought of anything happening to you." She dropped on the grass and, burying her face in her hands, sobbed aloud.

He knelt beside her and sought to take one of her hands.

Suddenly she hid her face against his breast for a moment and faltered, "Love me as a child *now* and leave me."

"You have given me my orders, little girl, and they would be obeyed as far as you could see were I with you every day."

"Lieutenant Scoville!" shouted the distant voice of an orderly. He hastily kissed away the tears in her eyes, exclaiming, "Never doubt my return, if living," and was gone.

In a moment he had passed through the shrubbery. Before she had regained self-control and followed he was speeding his horse toward the ridge. "There, he has gone without his dinner," she said in strong self-reproach, hastening to the cabin. Chunk, who was stuffing a chicken and cornbread into a haversack, reassured her. "Doan you worry, Miss Lou," he said. "Dis yere chicken gwine ter foller 'im right slam troo eberyting till hit cotch up," and he galloped after his new "boss" in a way to make good his words.

CHAPTER XXI

TWO STORMS

MISS Lou sank wearily on the doorstep of Aun' Jinkey's cabin where the reader first made her acquaintance. She drew a long sigh. "Oh, I must rest and get my breath. So much is happening!"

"You po' chile!" was the sympathetic response. "Ah well, honey, de good Lawd watchin' ober you. I year how dat ole snake in-de-grass Perkins git out Miss Whately's keridge en tink he gwine ter tote you off nobody know whar. You passin' troo de Red Sea long o' us, honey. I yeared how you say you doan wanter lebe yo' ole mammy. I ain' cried so sence I wus a baby w'en I yeared dat. Doan you reckermember, honey? You sot right dar en wish sump'n ter hap'n. I 'spects we bettah be keerful how we wishes fer tings. Doan you min' de time Uncle Lusthah pray fer rain en we wus all nigh drownded?"

"I'm not sorry, mammy, things happened, for my heart's been warmed, *warmed* as never before. Oh, it's so sweet to know that one is cared for; it is so sweet to have somebody look you in the eyes and say, "I want you to be happy in your own way."

"Did Marse Scoville say dat?"

The girl nodded.

"I'se hab ter smoke on dat ar lil whiles."

Both were lost in thought for a time, Miss Lou's eyes looking dreamily out through the pines and oaks as they had before when vaguely longing that the stagnation of her life might cease. All had become strangely still; not a sol-

dier was in sight; even the birds were quiet in the sultriness of the early afternoon. "Isn't it all a dream?" the girl asked suddenly.

"Kin' ob wish we could wake up den, if it is. See yere, Miss Lou, you on'y a lil chile arter all. Doan you see Marse Scoville des tekin' a longer way rôun' de bush? W'en he tell you he want you ter be happy he mean he want you hissef!"

"Oh, yes, Aun' Jinkey, that was plain enough; but do you know how he would take me and when?"

"Dat's des w'at I lak ter know, fer I tells you, chile, dis mar'in' business orful serus."

"He would take me only when I went to him of my own free will and not before. I feel just as safe with him as with you. I believe he would do what I asked just as he minds that general of his. That's the wonderful part of it, which almost takes away my breath. Why, only the other day uncle and aunt were ordering me about as they always have, and now here's a brave, educated man ready to do my bidding. What a goose Cousin Mad was! If he had acted that way I shouldn't have known any better I fear than to marry him. I was so starved for a little consideration and kindness, that if he'd been generous and made me feel that he cared for *me* and not for himself all the time, I fear I'd have just married him out of gratitude. I would have acted like an impulsive, ignorant child, blind to everything except that some one cared for me. But that's all past now. My eyes have been opened and I've been compelled to think and foresee the future. Dreary enough it would have been with him."

"What you gwine ter do, honey?"

"Stand on my rights. See how much I've learned in a few short days, yes, even hours. I've learned above all things that my life's my own. There were my relatives, who would reach out and take it, just as they would a ripe fig from a tree, with just about as much consideration for me as for the fig. Thank God! I have been shown clearly

my right to my own life. Since I have learned so much in a few days, I shall keep my freedom and choose that which is best for me as well as best for others."

"Now, honey, you on de right track, sho! Des you wait en lis'n. Mo' folks dan Marse Scoville wanter talk wid you on dis mar'age question. You on'y lil chile yit. Des you keep yosef deserved-like en say yo' mouf ain' waterin' few enybody. Marse Scoville berry nice gem'lin, but he yere to-day en like anuff a orful way yander ter-morrer—"

"No matter where he is, Aun' Jinkey, he will carry the love I could give to a kind brother if I had one. He knows I can do no more and he does not ask more."

"Yes, he does, honey; he ax hit in de bes way ter git hit fum you. He ain' de fool ter grab at hit, but he tek hit all de same."

"Well," she answered judicially, "I don't see how a girl can help it if a man thinks more of her than she of him, but it does make all the difference in the world whether a man tries to grab, as you say, or waits respectfully for what should be a free gift, to be worth anything. How strange it seems to be talking quietly of such things! Think of what has happened, what might have happened, and what may take place before night!"

"Well, honey, hit's a good ting ter stop tinkin' or ter tink slow sometimes. We couldn't keep a gwine as we wus. Our haids ud whirl right off our shol'ers. Hit's all so peaceful now, why doan you go ter yo' room en tek a nap. Mebbe you git berry lil sleep ter-night."

"I reckon your advice is good, mammy. If you have trouble, come to me."

As she walked through the garden and shrubbery to the mansion she felt that she was reacting from the strong excitements of the morning into languor and excessive weariness. The idle negroes had partially succumbed to the heat and quiet, and were generally dozing in the sun, even on this eventful day. Perkins, the exacting overseer, had dis-

appeared on the first alarm of Scoville's charge and had not been seen since. When entering the house Zany, who always seemed on the *qui vive*, told her that her aunts were in their rooms and that Mr. Baron was in his office. Going out on the veranda, the girl saw two or three vigilant Union videttes under a tree. It was evident that they had chosen a point which commanded a good view of the house, outbuildings and quarters. The ridge was still lined with troops, but they appeared to be scattered about at their ease on the ground. The girl's eyes drooped; she wearily climbed to her room and was soon asleep.

Many others slept also who would sleep again that night in the stillness of death; others who would groan through coming days and nights in anguished wakefulness. The temporary quiet did not deceive the resting soldiers on either side. They well knew that the active brains of their superiors were at work. Scoville found unexpected duty. He was given a score of men, with orders to scour the roads to the eastward, so that, if best, his general could retire rapidly and in assured safety toward the objective point where he was to unite with a larger force. Instead of resting, the young man was studying topography and enjoying the chicken which had at last caught up with him. He knew the importance of his work and did it thoroughly. Having chosen the road which promised best, he marked it on a map, expecting soon to go over it again as guide. He sighed deeply as he thought that it would lead away from the girl to whom he had devoted his life, yet not because he owed it to her. "If we could only remain together," he thought, "she would learn to give all that I give. The dear little girl is just learning that she is a woman, and is bewildered."

Major Jones, who had been skirmishing to delay the Confederate advance, allowed his men and horses to rest when the enemy paused for their mid-day bivouac, and so had come about a cessation of hostilities during which both parties took breath for the coming struggle.

Miss Lou was suddenly awakened by a jar which shook the house, followed by a strange, unearthly sound. For an instant she was confused, thinking night had come, so dark was her room. Springing to her window she threw open the blinds. A black, threatening sky met her gaze, the sunlight hidden by a dense bank of clouds, above which towered golden-tipped thunder-heads. The appearance of the ridge puzzled her. The cannon were there, a puff of smoke rolled heavily from one of them; but excepting a few gunners just about the pieces, the long line of men and horses had largely disappeared. Down the lawn from a point not far from the house to the main street and beyond was a line of horsemen, keeping abreast and equidistant from each other. What did it all mean? Facing the ridge on the left of the lawn was an extensive grove, through which the avenue wound in and out, and the line of horsemen was approaching this. Suddenly the very earth trembled and she saw smoke pouring upward among the trees from a rise of ground within the grove. All now became clear to her. While she had slept, the Confederates had come up, taken their position and the battle was beginning. In strong excitement she rushed down to the hall below, where she found her aunts with pallid, frightened faces. On the veranda was Mr. Baron, looking white indeed, but with firm, compressed lips and fiery eyes, watching the opening conflict.

"Go in," he said sternly, "this is no place for you."

In her intense absorption she did not even hear him. From the edge of the grove and along the avenue were now seen little puffs of smoke, followed by the sharp crack of carbines. The long line of Union skirmishers began to reply in like manner, but it was evident that they found themselves too obvious marks in the open. Here and there men fell from their saddles, and the riderless horses galloped away. The notes of a bugle were heard above the din, and the Union skirmish line retired rapidly to the foot of the ridge.

Miss Lou saw all this only as the eyes catch, half-involuntarily, what is passing before them. With an awe almost overwhelming, her attention was absorbed by a phase of war utterly unknown to her—an artillery duel. Two Confederate batteries in the grove had opened and defined their positions. The Union guns replied, shot for shot, in loud explosions, with answering, deep-toned roar. Above the detonations were heard the piercing screams of the shells as they flew back and forth. On the ridge they burst with a sharp crack and puff of vapor, with what effect could only be guessed; but the missiles which shrieked into the grove gave the impression of resistless, demoniacal power. Great limbs and even tops of trees fell crashing after them. Blending faintly with the rending sound which followed were screams and yells.

"Well," exclaimed the girl, "if Cousin Mad is there he at least is brave. It seems as if my knees would give way under me."

Even as she spoke, a forked line of light burned downward athwart the heavy rising clouds. The smoke of the battle was lurid an instant; then came a peal which dwarfed the thunder of earthly artillery. Strange to say, the sound was reassuring to the girl; it was familiar. "Ah!" she cried, "the voice of heaven is louder than this din, and heaven after all is supreme. This fiery battle will soon be quenched and hot blood cooled."

The voice in the sky was unheeded, for entering the lawn from the road, distant from the mansion about an eighth of a mile, was seen a solid gray column. On it went toward the ridge at a sharp trot. "Ah!" groaned Mr. Baron, "now comes the tug of war."

The girl screamed and moaned as she saw shells tearing their way through this column, horses and men rolling over on the ground, puffs of smoke which rose revealing frightful gaps; but on flowed the dark gray torrent as if propelled by an invisible, resistless force. Vacancies made by wounds and death were closed almost instantly. In the strange,

luminous twilight made by the approaching storm, the impetuous advance was wonderfully distinct in the distance, like a vivid silhouette.

As the head of the column drew near the gentle acclivity, it fairly seemed to crumble. Grape shot was now making havoc; but for every man and horse that fell, two apparently came on as from an exhaustless reservoir. High above all sounds now came a yell which, once heard, can never be forgotten, and the Confederate column deployed at a gallop, charging the ridge. The Union skirmish line had already retired to the right, while pouring over the ridge by which they had been hitherto concealed, came rank after rank of men in blue, their deeper chest shouts blending with the shriller cries of their enemies. Charge was being met with counter charge. Cannon were silent, for now friends and foes were too near together. Even the clouds loomed silently, as if in suspense, over the terrific shock of the two lines of approaching cavalry.

"Awful! awful!" moaned the girl.

"Oh! if Madison is meeting that onset!" shrieked Mrs. Whately, beside herself with horror, yet compelled to look by a terrible fascination.

Just as the two opposing forces dashed together a bolt of lightning gleamed over them, turning the upraised sabres for an instant into swords of fire. The crash of thunder followed so swiftly that it appeared to result from the impact of the two charging lines. An impression of annihilation was given, but so far was it from being realized, that the slope was seen to be alive with a struggling, seething mass, waving back and forth, at first downward, then stationary, then gradually upward, upward, until Mr. Baron shouted, "Hurrah! our men are carrying the ridge!"

The cry was scarcely uttered before another dark line of horsemen on the far right was seen galloping forward toward the Confederate flank. Again there was another vivid flash, lighting up the scene with a lurid, momentary glare. The peal which followed created the illusion of sounding

this new charge or else to be the thunder of the onset. It turned the fortune of the battle on the right, for the Confederates were seen to pause, and finally to give back slowly and stubbornly. Then the advancing rainfall began to blot the combatants from view.

Suddenly the Union artillery opened. It seemed to the terrified spectators on the veranda as if the shells were shrieking directly toward them, but the iron bolts tore their way through the grove, although much nearer the house than before. The reason soon became apparent. On that ridge, and within the gloomy shadows of the trees, were officers as coolly observant as if playing a game of chess. They gave no more heed to the terrific peals of thunder than they would have done to so many Chinese gongs. While watching the attack upon his centre and providing against it, General Marston was also seeking to penetrate, by means of a powerful glass, the mask of the grove, and so detected a concentration on his left. Instantly his guns began to shell the grove near the house, where the assaulting force was massing. His reserves were ordered forward, and instructions rapidly given to the colonel who was to repel the attack; meanwhile his field-glass was glued to his eyes.

Soon he cried, "It will be their supreme effort. We must strike a stunning blow in order to get away in safety," and he sprang on his horse and started the charge himself.

The men, adoring their leader, followed with stern resolve and high enthusiasm. Scoville, who had returned, reported and rested somewhat, knew how critical was the moment. He rode close to the general, but did not fall out when the wary commanding officer permitted the human bolt he had launched to pass beyond him. He was responsible for the entire force, and must do just enough and no more. He must still keep his eyes on all parts of the field and his brain ready to direct when the result of the charge was known. More than the military necessity of repelling the Confederate charge bursting from the grove occupied the mind of Scoville. It looked to him as if the fight would

take place about the very home of the girl to whom his heart was so tender, and his impulse was to be near, to protect and defend.

The light was fading fast; the fury of the storm, whose preliminary blasts were shaking the dwelling, was coming as if an ally with the galloping Union ranks and threatening the equally impetuous onset of the Confederates. In the very van of the Southern force a vivid flash of lightning revealed Mad Whately, with a sabre of flame. For once he made a heroic figure. His mother saw him and shrieked despairingly, but her voice was lost in the wild uproar of thunder, yells and shouts of the combatants, the shock of steel and crash of firearms. Then torrents of rain, which had approached like a black curtain extending from heaven to earth, hid the awful scene of conflict. It vanished like a dream, and would have seemed but a nightmare had not the ominous sounds continued.

Mr. Baron broke the spell which had fallen upon him, dragged his sister and niece within the door, and bolted it with difficulty against the spray-laden gusts.

CHAPTER XII

CHUNK'S QUEST

IF there had been sufficient light the battle might have continued in spite of the tropical downpour, but darkness became so intense that friend and foe were alike disguised from each other. At this crisis, Scoville's horse was shot and fell, dragging his rider down also. A flash of lightning revealed the mishap to Mad Whately, who secured the capture of the Union officer before he could extricate himself.

By a sort of mutual consent the contending forces drew apart. Prisoners had been taken on both sides, and Whately, who had badly sprained his arm, unfitting himself for active duty, was given charge of those secured by the Confederates.

General Marston withdrew the Union forces to the ridge again. He was satisfied that prudence required rapid progress toward his somewhat distant destination. True, he had severely checked his foes, but he knew that they had reinforcements near, while he had not. He deeply regretted Scoville's absence and possible death, but he had the map, and the men who had been out with the scout were acquainted with the selected road. Therefore, as soon as the violence of the storm abated and the moon shed a faint radiance through the murky clouds, he renewed his march as rapidly as the rain-soaked ground permitted. Fires were lighted along the ridge to deceive the enemy, and a rear-guard left to keep them burning.

The trembling household within the mansion slowly rallied as the sounds of battle died away. As soon as the fury

of the conflict and storm decreased, Mr. Baron lighted a candle and they looked into one another's white faces.

Miss Lou was the first to recover some intrepidity of spirit. "Well," she said, "we are still alive, and these torrents are evidently stopping the fighting as they would put out fire."

"Oh, Madison, Madison!" Mrs. Whately moaned, "are *you* living, or are you dead? If you are dead it is little to me that I am spared."

Miss Lou did not give very much thought to her cousin. In overpowering solicitude she asked herself, "Where is he whose eyes looked such strange, sweet truth into mine to-day? Are they unseeing, not because it is dark, but because the light of life is quenched?"

The brunt of the storm soon passed and was followed by a drizzling rain and the promise of a gloomy night. As the howling wind ceased their clamor, new blood-curdling sounds smote the girl's ears—the cries of wounded and dying men and horses. Then the ghastly truth, scarcely thought of in the preceding excitement, sickened her heart, for she remembered that, scattered over the lawn and within the grove, were mutilated, bleeding forms. They were all the more vividly presented to her fancy because hidden by the night.

But little time elapsed before the activity of the surgeons began. Mr. Baron was summoned and told that his piazzas and as many rooms as possible must be occupied, and part of the wide hall fitted up with appliances for amputations. Every suitable place in the out-buildings was also required.

Mrs. Baron almost shrieked as she heard this, seeing at one mental glance the dwelling which it had been her ruling passion to maintain in immaculate order, becoming blood-stained and muddy from top to bottom.

Mrs. Whately asked only for her son, and he soon appeared, with the excitement of battle still in his eyes. She rushed to his arms and sobbed on his breast.

"Come, mother," he exclaimed, "we've no time for this

now. Please get a sling for this left arm, which aches horribly—only a sprain, but right painful all the same."

Before the agitated lady could recover herself, Miss Lou ran to her room and returned with a scarf which answered the purpose.

"Oh, you deign to do something for me?" he said bitterly.

"Come, cousin," she replied, "since I have not lost my senses after what's happened it's time you regained yours."

"Thank you, my dear," said his mother fervently, as she adjusted the support for the disabled arm. "Yes, I trust that we may all regain our senses, and, if we outlive these scenes, begin to act as if we were sane."

"There, that will do," he said impatiently. "I must go now, for I have important duties," and he hastened away.

Meantime General Marston had sent word through his picket line that he would not interfere with the care of the wounded and that the dwelling would not be fired upon if used as a hospital. He accompanied this assurance with the offer of medical stores, coffee, sugar and the services of two surgeons. The Confederate general accepted the offer. The trembling negroes were routed out of their quarters, and compelled more or less reluctantly to help bring in the wounded. Uncle Lusthah showed no hesitancy in the humane work and soon inspired those over whom he had influence with much of his spirit. It had been a terribly anxious day for him and those about him. Hope had ebbed and flowed alternately until night, when the day which seemed to him the dawning of the millennium ended as he imagined the world might end. Now, however, he was comforted in the performance of good works, and he breathed words of Christian hope into more than one dying ear that night.

Perkins, the overseer, was animated by a very different spirit. At the first alarm of Scoville's return in the morning he had dashed into the grove, and next concealed himself on a distant eminence from which he could watch events. Under the cover of darkness he returned, and ex-

perienced grim satisfaction when he discovered the hated Union officer among the prisoners.

As Whately was making his final arrangements for the night, Perkins touched his arm saying, "Leftenant, I'll help watch that Yank thar" (pointing to Scoville). "They say he's ez slip'ry ez a eel."

"Do so, Perkins. We both have a heavy score to settle with him. At daylight I'll send him where he won't fare as well as he did on this plantation."

"Is your arm woun'ed?"

"No, only sprained, but it pains like the devil. Watch that Yank well. I'd rather they all got away than he."

"He'll never get away alive," was the ominous reply.

As was true after the first skirmish recorded in this history, Mrs. Whately now again appeared to the best advantage. Relieved from overwhelming anxiety in regard to her son, her heart overflowed with pity for the injured. From the outer darkness, limp, helpless forms, in blood-stained garments, were borne in. Groans and half-stifled cries began to resound through the house. Even Mrs. Baron forgot all else now but the pressing necessity of relieving pain and saving life, but she had eyes only for those who wore the gray. Mrs. Whately, on the contrary, made no distinction, and many a poor fellow, in blue as well as gray, blessed her as she aided the surgeons, two of whom were from the Union lines. Miss Lou remained chiefly in her own room and busied herself preparing bandages, sparing not her own rather scanty store of underclothing in the task.

Mr. Baron was in the dining-room, dispensing wines and liquors to the officers who were coming and going. The Confederate general had made the wide hearth, on which roared an ample fire, his headquarters for the time, and was turning first one side then the other toward the blaze, in order to dry his uniform. Poor Aun' Suke had been threatened into renewed activity, and with many colored assistants had begun a stewing, baking and frying which

promised to be interminable. Chickens, pigs and cattle had been killed wherever found, for hungry soldiers after a battle and in darkness ask no questions on either side. Mr. Baron knew he was being ruined, but since it was in behalf of his friends, he maintained remarkable fortitude, while his wife, with her thin, white, set face, honored every requisition.

Some of the negroes, sighing for what seemed vanishing freedom, sought to reach the Union force, but were stopped at the picket line by which General Marston masked his retirement from the field. The majority of the slaves, however, were kept at work indoors and out, under the eyes of the Confederates, who quickly showed themselves to be savage toward any disposition to shirk orders.

There was one who would have received short shrift if hands could have been laid upon him—Chunk. None knew this better than he, yet he was as fearless as he was shrewd. Scoville had already won from him unlimited devotion—bought him, body and soul, with kindness and freedom. When he found his new master had not returned from the final charge, Chunk questioned one and another until he learned that Scoville had been seen to go down and then disappear in the gloom. Whether he had been killed or captured, no one knew, but Chunk resolved to find out before morning at all risks. Yet in the darkness and rain he felt much confidence in his ability to elude danger, for he knew every inch of the ground and of numerous places for concealment.

He set about his task in the most matter-of-fact way, resolving to begin operations with a good supper. At this early stage Aun' Jinkey and her cabin were both forgotten, and the poor old woman was half dead from terror. When Chunk tapped at the one window, she feared the spooks of dead soldiers had already begun their persecutions. Never was there a more welcome and reassuring sound than the impatient voice of her grandson, and she soon so rallied as to get him something to eat.

"I darsn't come in," he said. "I got ter be whar I kin run en hide. Now granny, lis'n wid all yo' ears. Marse Scoville killed, woun'ed or took. I'se gwine ter fin' out which. W'en dey gits mo' settle down lak anuff dey be lookin' fer me yere, en I kyant come yere no mo', but I kin git ter Miss Lou's winder ef she hab no light in her room. I safest whar dey ain' lookin' fer me. Tell her ter put no light sho! Mebbe she hafter hep me git Marse Scoville off, ef he took en ef he woun'ed she de one ter 'tect en keer fer 'im. Dat ar Perkins kill 'im sho, ef he git de charnce. Now ef you years me toot twice lak a squinch-owl, you knows dat you got ter go en tell Miss Lou dat I need her hep en dat I gwine ter creep 'long de pazzer roof ter her winder. Ef I doan toot you keeps quiet till you sees me agin," and he disappeared.

"Who'd a thunk dat ar boy had sech a haid!" ejaculated Aun' Jinkey, lighting her pipe. Deep as would now be her solicitude and great as her fears, her grandson's appearance and words had dispelled the spook-phase of her tribulations.

Chunk could run on all fours as easily as in an upright position, and he made his way rapidly through the darkness. His first aim was to get his eye on Perkins and Mad Whately, from whom he felt that he and Scoville had the most to fear. He was now armed with a knife and short club, as well as a revolver, and was determined to use them rather than be captured. Skulking, creeping and hiding in deep shadow, he at last saw Perkins issuing from his house, carrying his lantern. Following, he distinctly observed the brief interview between the overseer and Whately, and guessed correctly that Scoville was among the prisoners. He was soon able so to shift his position as to satisfy himself on this point, and also to note that Perkins, from his movements, would be one of the guard. By the gleams of the lantern Chunk also saw that Scoville appeared to be watching the overseer as if suspecting treachery. "I watch 'im too," the negro soliloquized. "Ef he play eny debil trick he hissef gwine ter de debil sud'n."

Scoville was indeed anxious about his position, for while he believed that Whately was scarcely capable of transcending the usages of war, he knew well that opportunity only limited the malignity of Perkins. He therefore rarely took his eyes from this personal enemy.

For his own sake and that of the guards, Perkins aided in building a fire, for in the continued rain all were chilled. As Chunk saw the leaping flames and the lantern so placed that its rays fell on Scoville, he was almost in despair of any chance for rescue, but believed that his best course was to watch for some change which promised better. He remembered how Scoville had employed the hootings of the screech-owl as a signal, and resolved by the same means to prepare the prisoner for co-operation with any effort in his behalf. Therefore he hooted softly and was glad to see from Scoville's alert yet wary manner that he had recognized the signal.

So intent was Chunk in watching his master that he did not hear the steps of a bewildered Confederate who stumbled over him and fell headlong with a volley of oaths. The negro employed woful strategy to mislead the soldier, for he grunted like a pig, thus awakening hopes of more fried pork. The result was immediate pursuit by all within hearing, and Chunk with difficulty escaped by the aid of darkness and his complete familiarity with the place. When at last he found himself secure he panted, "Mout ez well be took fer Chunk ez a hog. Stand des ez good a charnce. Won't try dat ar game agin."

He was now sorely puzzled to know what to do, and his nerves were somewhat shaken by his narrow escape. At last he resolved to send his granny to Miss Lou and consult with the girl. Accordingly, he stole into the shrubbery of the garden and hooted twice, rightly thinking that Scoville could hear the signal also and believe that something might be attempted in his behalf. Cowering under a bush, he soon observed Aun' Jinkey tottering toward the house, muttering, "Good Lawd, hep us!" as she went.

As the excitement of battle and exultation over the capture of Scoville subsided in Whately's mind he became excessivly weary and his exhausted frame suffered from the chill and wetness of the night. He had sought to keep up by liberal potations in his uncle's dining-room, but was resolved to get a night's sleep if possible. He had urgently charged the sergeant of the guard over the prisoners to be vigilant. When Perkins offered to share in this watch Whately, understanding the vindictive motive, felt that he need give himself no further anxiety. He next sought his mother and obtained a little food which the lady had brought to her room.

"Where is Cousin Lou?" the young man asked.

"She is in her own room, and with Zany's help making bandages. I would advise you not to see her again to-night. You are greatly wearied."

"Little wonder, after riding nearly all last night, and the fighting to-day."

"Yes, I know, and have thought of all nearly every moment. I am only too thankful that you have survived. You have gone to the limit of human endurance and must sleep. The less you and Louise say to each other for a short time the better. After you have both grown calmer and have had a chance to think you will see things in a different light."

"Mother, do you think I mean to be thwarted by that girl? I would marry her now from pure pride—for the sake of humbling her and teaching her that she made the mistake of her life in so crossing my will and in subjecting me to the mortification I endured this morning."

"Madison! actuated by such motives, you'll never win her! If you will closely follow my advice I believe you can succeed. I must tell you plainly that if you join with brother and his wife in their tactics it will always end much as it did this morning."

"Well, anyhow, I have that cursed Yankee cub that she went walking with in my power."

"What! Lieutenant Scoville?"

"Yes; he's a prisoner and Perkins is helping watch him."

"Then I implore you not to let Louise know it. She saw that this Scoville might have killed you. She is merely friendly toward him because, instead of treating us rudely, as she was led to believe he would, he was very polite and considerate when we were in his power. That wretch Perkins tried to shoot him to-day and probably would have succeeded but for Louise," and she narrated the circumstances.

Her son frowned only the darker from jealousy and anger.

"Oh, Madison! why won't you see things as they are?" his mother resumed. "If you had treated this Yankee officer with kindness and thanked him for his leniency toward us, you would have taken a long step in her favor. If you were trying to make her hate you, how could you set about it more skilfully?"

"Mother," he replied doggedly, "if Lou had married me, even if she had yielded reluctantly, I would have been her slave; but she has defied me, humiliated and scoffed at me, and I shall never whine and fawn for her favor again. I don't believe it would be of any use. If I should change my tactics she would only despise and laugh at me. What's more, my very nature revolts at such a change. I can't and won't make it. She shall learn to fear me. Women marry for fear as well as love. This Scoville gives me a chance to teach her the first lesson. He shall be sent by daylight to a Southern prison and that will be the last of him. Lou shall learn, as all will find out, that it's poor policy to thwart me. That major who interfered so impudently in our affairs is dead."

"Oh, Madison!"

"You needn't look so. I had nothing to do with it. There were plenty of Yankee bullets flying to-day. All I mean to say is that it will prove serious for any one to

cross my path. Fate is on the side of a man who *will* have his own way, and Lou will discover this fact sooner or later."

Poor Mrs. Whately was compelled to rate these vaporings at their true worth, seeing that between wine, anger and long-indulged arrogance, he was in a melodramatic mood and beyond reason: so she only said soothingly, "Please never let Louise know that I was aware of Scoville's captivity. After you have rested and have had time to think you will see things differently. I warn you however against Perkins," she added solemnly. "If you identify yourself with him in any way you may involve yourself and all of us in ruin. Now come, I will make a bed for you at the end of the hall near my room, and you had better sleep while you can."

He readily acquiesced, for even his lurid schemes for the future could keep him awake no longer. In a few moments he was sleeping soundly on a mattress, wrapped in a blanket. His uniform was hung on the back of a chair near him to dry.

CHAPTER XXIII

A BOLD SCHEME

AUN' JINKEY gained Miss Lou's room in safety, but panting so from fright and exhaustion as to be for a few moments utterly incapable of speech. The girl divined that something serious was to be told. To her questioning look, the old mammy nodded, glancing meantime at Zany as much as to say, "We should be alone." This quick-witted negress, consumed with curiosity about Chunk, and some deeper interest, resolved not to be sent away.

"Why you look dat away at Miss Lou, Aun' Jinkey?" Zany asked indignantly. "Time you knowed dat Miss Lou trus' me en I ain' doin' not'n ter loss dat trus'. She know bettah'n you dat ef dars eny ting ter be done I de one ter he'p."

"We can trust Zany," whispered Miss Lou, who had become very pale. "You have some news about Lieutenant Scoville?"

"Well, on'y dis, honey, Chunk lookin' fer 'im. Marse Scoville didn't come back fum dat las' fight, he say, en he say ter me dat ef he toot twiced lak a squinch-owl dat mean I go ter you, fer he need yo' he'p. He des done tooted," and Aun' Jinkey repeated all of her grandson's words as far as she could remember them.

Miss Lou thought a few moments and her face grew very resolute. "Aun' Jinkey," she said, "tell Chunk I will do as he wishes, but he must act carefully and not too hastily. Cousin Mad is already asleep. One after another will fol-

low his example, and fewer will be around by and by. We must take no risks that can be helped. The fact that he wishes to see me in this secret way is pretty good proof that the lieutenant is a prisoner. If he were wounded or—or—" but a rush of tears suggested the word she could not utter. "You had better go now, and let no one frighten you into telling anything. Appeal to me if threatened."

As the old woman was stealing out she met Mrs. Baron, who asked sharply, "What do you want?"

"Does you tink I doan wanter know dat chile is safe?"

"If you wish to be safe yourself, see to it you have nothing more to do with that grandson of yours. He has sinned away *his* day of grace, and no mercy will be shown to those who have anything more to do with him."

"I years you, misus," said Aun' Jinkey, stolidly continuing on her way.

Miss Lou, who had followed her mammy to the head of the stairs, heard this warning and returned to her room with a stern look. She deemed it best to say nothing and give the impression that she could not endure the sights and sounds below stairs.

Mrs. Whately entered soon afterward and did her best to propitiate her niece. Miss Lou pretended to be very weary and was glad to see that her aunt actually was so. At last the matron said, "Well, I'll go down once more and see if there is anything which I must attend to; then I shall try to rest a little while Madison is sleeping. Such experiences as we've had wear one out fast. I advise you, too, my dear, to sleep when you can."

"Yes, aunt, I suppose you are right. So much may happen to-morrow."

Mrs. Whately soon retired, and Miss Lou, listening at her door a moment, knew that she was sleeping. Then she returned to her own room, blew out her candle, opened the window softly and waited for Chunk. "Zany," she said, "sit in the dark there, and do not speak or let Chunk know you are here, unless permitted."

Along the most secluded end of the house the piazza had not been built, a small lean-to extension taking its place. An apartment was thus formed which could be entered from without as well as from within the dwelling, and here Mr. Baron maintained what was at once a business office and a study. This extension was but one story high, with a roof which sloped to rising ground beyond. Chunk knew that he could easily gain this roof, and from it that of the front piazza also. When returning through the garden Aun' Jinkey had whispered to him not to make the attempt to see Miss Lou until her light was extinguished. Then she added the words that Mrs. Baron had just spoken to her and hastened tremblingly to her own chimney-corner. Chunk made a wide circle, approaching the house again at an angle which would give him a view of Miss Lou's window, and watching till it darkened. From the garden he had carried a small, light ladder which he had used when pruning fruit-trees. He stole near the extension warily, the shrubbery growing in that vicinity favoring his effort, and the heavy pall of clouds obscuring almost entirely the mild radiance of the moon.

Satisfied by a careful reconnoissance that no one was watching or stirring at that end of the house, with the stealth and agility of a cat he went from roof to roof and crawled to Miss Lou's window.

"Chunk," she whispered.

"Dat's me, mistis."

"You're a good, brave fellow. Now tell me quick—don't waste a word—where is Lieutenant Scoville?"

"He's wid de pris'ners, en Perkins en sogers watchin' 'im."

"Why is Perkins watching him?" the girl asked in deep alarm.

"Dunno, Miss Lou, 'cept on 'count ob he grudge. Mad Whately en he talk knowin'-like en den Perkins tek he lantern en jine de gyard. W'en I las' see 'im he watchin' Marse Scoville close."

"Lieutenant Scoville wasn't hurt, was he?"

"Reck'n not. Didn't 'pear dat away, but he look at Perkins ez ef he feared on 'im. Ef I had ony Perkins ter deal wid I gib Marse Scoville he freedom in pay fer mine, but dar's sogers all aroun' en dey stick me quick ez dey would a pig."

"Oh, Chunk! what shall we do? I could have no influence over the guard or Perkins either. Oh! *oh!* Mad Whately, you'll end by making me loathe you. To think of employing that treacherous wretch!"

"Dat's des w'at I feard on, Miss Lou. Reck'n yo' cousin en Perkins projeckin' some debil trick."

"You say my cousin has charge of the prisoners?"

"Yassum. I yeared 'im gib de orders 'bout um. but I too fur off ter year w'at he say."

"Can you think of any way, Chunk?"

"Ef de gyard ony all get ter sleep, I'd tek de risk ob tacklin' Perkins, but dere's too many en I des stumped ter know w'at ter do."

"Hi! Miss Lou," whispered listening Zany, "I kin tell you w'at ter do."

"Doan you pay no 'tention ter her foolishness," said Chunk coolly. "Dis life-en-death business, en Zany outgrowed her sense."

"En you ain' growed into your'n," responded Zany. "Ef you has, why doan you tell Miss Lou 'bout tings dat kin be done 'stead o tings dat kyant be?"

"Well, Zany, what have you to say? Quick, and speak lower."

"Miss Lou, dar's Mad Whately's coat en pants hangin' out in de hall. You put dem on, en tie yo' arm up in a sling. In de night who say you ain Marse Whately?"

"Oh, Zany!" exclaimed the girl, appalled at first by the boldness of the scheme.

"Well, dar now," whispered Chunk, "who'd tink dat ar gyurl got so much gumption! See yere, Miss Lou, dat de way ef you got de spunk ter do it. Ole Perkins tink you

Mad Whately comin' ter play de debil trick en let you tek Marse Scoville way quietly, en de gyard won' 'fere wid you nudder, kase dey un'er yo' cousin. You kin go en lead Marse Scoville right off, en if Perkins follow I settle 'im."

"Do you think there's no other way ?" Miss Lou asked, with quick, agitated breathing.

"'Fo' de Lawd, I doesn't."

"I don't know what they would do to me in the morning, I'd be sent away. Oh, you can't realize the risk I would take."

"'Spects not, mistis. I ony know Marse Scoville tek mo' resk fer you ef he could."

Chunk had touched the right chord now. She set her white face like flint in the darkness, and said, "I'll make the attempt, no matter what happens to me."

"Den I des sneak out en get he coat en trousers," Zany whispered.

"Yes."

"En, Miss Lou, you des come out de house dis away wid me en Zany," Chunk added. "Less charnce er bein' stopped. We kin go troo de gyardin end de bushes till we mos' whar we kin see Marse Scoville. Mebbe hit berry much plainer w'at ter do arter we get out en look roun'. I hab a ladder yere en you git down mighty easy."

"Yes, that's the best way. I wish to take no risks of being seen till after I make my attempt."

Zany reconnoitred the hall. No one was in sight. Even Mrs. Baron, wearied out, had retired, and Mr. Baron had resolved to spend the night in the dining-room, partly out of courtesy to the Confederate general and partly to be ready for any emergency. In the hall and on the front and rear piazzas were alert sentinels who would have observed and reported any unusual proceeding—therefore Chunk's plan was the only feasible one. In the darkness Zany helped Miss Lou don her cousin's uniform and slouched hat which, limp from the rain, fell over her face. She was not so very much shorter than he as to make the fit a bad

one when seen in the partial light. The trousers had to be turned up, but that would be expected on account of the mud. Her plumpness filled out the coat very comfortably, and her arm in a sling made the disguise almost perfect.

While Miss Lou was dressing Chunk again reconnoitred and reported the coast clear. It was now about midnight and all were sleeping except those whom imperative duty or pain kept awake. Chunk led the way, steadying Miss Lou with a firm hand, and Zany followed.

"Now, Miss Lou," Chunk whispered, "I tek you de s'curest way, so you git back en' nobody see you ef I git cotched."

They made a circuit to avoid the kitchen and climbed over a low fence into the garden. On the further side, opening on the driveway to the stables, was a gate. Before reaching this, Miss Lou said to Zany, "You stay here. If there's an alarm, go to the kitchen. You must not be known to have had anything to do with this affair. It might cost you your life."

"Ve'y well, Miss Lou."

The young girl and her guide paused at the gate some moments, for attendants upon the wounded, with whom the outbuildings were filled, were passing to and fro. At last they stole across the roadway to the shelter of a clump of trees beyond. From this point they could see the group of prisoners about the fire, which was in a rather dying condition. It was evident that some of the guards had succumbed to weariness, but Perkins still watched with the tirelessness of hate, his lantern so placed that its rays fell on Scoville, who could not make a movement without being observed. Indeed, it was clear that he, too, was almost overcome with sleep, for he occasionally nodded and swayed before the fire.

"Now, Miss Lou," whispered Chunk, "I gwine ter wake Marse Scoville up by tootin' lak a squinch-owl," and he did so briefly.

The Union officer was much too wary to start and look

around, but he gradually proved that he was alert. Close scrutiny of Perkins showed that the signal had no significance to him.

"Miss Lou," resumed Chunk, "dere's not'n fer you but ter walk right down de road ter de fire, berry quiet like, put yo' finger on yo' lips ter Perkins so he tink you 'bout ter play de debil trick, en' den lead Marse Scoville into de gyardin. Ef Perkins foller, I foller 'im. My hoss down by de run en we git off dat away."

The girl drew a long breath and started. Now that she was in the crisis of the emergency a certain innate spirit and courage sustained her. Knowing her cousin so well, she could assume his very gait and manner, while her arm, carried in a sling, perfected a disguise which only broad light would have rendered useless. Her visit caused no surprise to the sergeant of the guard, on whom at first she kept her eyes. He merely saluted and thought Lieutenant Whately was attentive to his duty. Perkins was not surprised either, yet a little perplexed. As it had been supposed and hoped, the thought rose instantly in his revengeful nature that the Confederate officer had some design on Scoville. The latter watched the form recognized by the others as that of Whately with the closest scrutiny, and an immense throb of hope stirred his heart. Could it be possible?

Miss Lou looked over the sleeping prisoners for a moment and then, as if satisfied, stepped quite near to Perkins, guarding meantime not to permit the rays of the lamp to fall on her face. "Leave him to me," she whispered, with a nod toward Scoville, and she put her finger to her lips. She next touched Scoville on the shoulder and simply said, "Come."

He rose as if reluctantly and followed.

Perkins did not suspect the ruse, the disguise was so good and Whately's right to appear so unquestioned; but he felt defrauded in having no part in the vengeance which he supposed would be wreaked on Scoville. After a moment or two of thought, he obeyed the impulse to follow,

hoping to see what Whately intended to do, and if circumstances warranted, to be near to help. "If Mad Whately's high-strung notions lead 'im to fight a duel," he thought, "en the Yank comes off best, I'll settle my own score. Whately was ter'ble stirred up 'bout the Yank's talkin' ter his cousin, en would like ter kill 'im, but his officer-notions won't let 'im kill the blue-coated cuss ez I would. Ef thar's ter be a fight, I won't be fur off," and he stole after the two figures disappearing in the gloom.

But Nemesis was on his steps. Chunk had shaken with silent laughter as he saw that their scheme was working well, but he never took his eyes from Perkins. Crouching, crawling, he closed on the overseer's track, and when the man passed into the garden, the negro followed.

As Scoville accompanied Miss Lou, he soon ventured to breathe her name in a tentative way. "Hush!" she whispered. Then his heart beat thick with overpowering emotions of gratitude, admiration and love. Entering the garden, she led the way quickly toward Aun' Jinkey's cabin, and at a point where the shrubbery was thickest about the path, turned suddenly, put her finger on her lips, and breathed, "Listen."

They distinctly heard steps following and drew back into the bushes. Then came the thud of a blow and the heavy fall of a man. The blow was so severe that not even a groan followed, and for a moment all was still. Then Chunk, like a shadow, glided forward and would have passed had not Miss Lou whispered his name.

"Foller me," he answered breathlessly.

This they did, but Scoville secured the girl's hand and carried it to his lips. The negro led the way beyond the garden to the run, where he had left his horse. "Lis'n onct mo'," he said. "Dat was Perkins I laid out."

All was still. "Chunk," said Scoville, "go back on your tracks a little and see if there are any signs of alarm."

Obedience was very prompt, for Chunk muttered as he

ran, "My heart des bustin' 'bout Zany. Got ter lebe her now, sho! Ter thunk ob her showin' so much gumption!"

Scoville again took Miss Lou's hands. "Oh, hasten, hasten," she said breathlessly, "you are in great danger here."

"I can scarcely speak to you," he replied, "my heart is so full. You brave, noble little girl! How *have* you accomplished this?"

Incoherently she told him and again urged, "Oh, *do* go at once, for my sake as well as yours, or all may be in vain. I can't breathe until I've put back my cousin's uniform."

Now that the supreme crisis of danger had apparently passed for the moment, she was trembling violently in nervous reaction, and could speak only in little gasps. Every instant a deeper appreciation of the immense effort she had made in his behalf overwhelmed Scoville, and for a moment he lost all self-control. Snatching her to his breast he whispered, "Oh, you little hero, you little saint, I wish I could shield you with my life. I don't believe you half realize what you have done for me, bravest, truest, sweetest—"

"Oh, hush," she pleaded, extricating herself from his arms. "Go, *please* go at once, for my sake."

"Yes, my dear girl, I must go soon, more for your sake than mine. With this horse and this start, I am safe. Oh, it's terribly hard to leave you." Then he hooted low to recall Chunk. "Don't tremble so. After all, it's best to wait a few moments to make sure there is no pursuit. Thank God, after what you have done for me to-night you will never forget me, you will always care for me. Again I see as never before how true it is that a woman cares most for him whom most she has tried to help. You have risked much for me; I give all to you. Only death can keep me from seeking you and living for you always. Remember, I ask nothing which your own heart does not prompt, but you cannot help my giving undying loyalty. See, I just kneel to you in homage and gratitude. There never was such a gem of a girl."

Chunk now appeared, recalled from a more affectionate parting than Zany had ever vouchsafed before, and he began to unhitch the horse.

"Chunk must go back with you," Scoville began.

"Oh, no," she whispered, "I cannot breathe till you both are well away. Chunk would be killed instantly—"

"No matter; he has become a soldier like myself and must take all risks. I will not leave this spot—I will go with you myself, rather than leave you here."

"Why, ob co'se I 'spects ter go back wid you, Miss Lou. You tink I gwine ter lebe you yere en dat ladder dar ter tell de hull business? Come wid me."

"Well, then, good-by, and God keep you, Lieutenant. I shall hope to see you again."

"To see *you* again will be my dearest hope. Dear, *dear* little Lou! how brave you've been! You've won a soldier's whole heart forever. How can I say good-by? You can't dream how dear you have become to me. Please, one kiss before we separate."

Yielding to an impulse then not understood, she put her arm swiftly about his neck, kissed him, and turned so rapidly toward her home that Chunk could scarcely keep pace with her.

They reached the ladder unobserved, and from the roof of the extension the way to Miss Lou's room was easy. Chunk went to a point from which he could watch the girl enter her apartment. Putting the ladder back into the garden, he rejoined Scoville, and together they made their way in the direction of the retiring Union column. Scoville never wearied in questioning his attendant about every detail of Miss Lou's action, while conjectures as to her experiences often robbed him of sleep. Never was a man more completely won and held in love's sweet thraldom.

On regaining her room, Miss Lou hastily threw off her cousin's clothes and resumed her own apparel. Then she softly and cautiously opened her door. With the exception of sounds in the lower hall, all was still, and she slipped out

in her stocking-feet, replaced the uniform on the chairs, stole back and bolted her door. For half an hour she sat panting on her chair, listening to every sound. Only the groans of the wounded smote her ears. "Oh, thank God! I do not hear *his* voice among them," she half sobbed, in pity for those who *were* suffering. "Well, I can best forget my anxiety about him by doing something for these poor men. Oh, how strange and true his words are! He touched my heart at first by just being helpless when he fell by the run, and everything I do for him seems to make him dearer. It cannot be that I shall never see him again. Oh, when shall I forget the way he took me in his arms? It seemed as if he gave me his whole heart then and couldn't help himself."

There was a near mutter of thunder. In her deep preoccupation she had not noticed the coming of another shower. It proved a short but heavy one, and she exulted. "The rain will obliterate all our tracks."

Calmer thought led to the conclusion that the affair would be very serious for her if her part in it was discovered. She had acted almost without thought, without realizing the risks she had incurred, and now the possible consequences so appalled her that she resolved to be on her guard in every possible way. "He knew, he understood the risk I took better than I did then, better than I do now, perhaps," she breathed softly. "That's so fine in him—that way he has of making me feel that one's *worth* being cared for." She was far too excited and anxious to sleep. Wrapping herself up, she watched at her window. Soon the stars began to twinkle beneath the clouds in the west, showing that this last shower was a clearing one, and that the radiance of the moon might soon be undimmed. The fires along the ridge which, as she believed, still defined the Union position, were burning low. Suddenly flashes and reports of firearms in that direction startled her.

CHAPTER XXIV

A HOME A HOSPITAL

THE sudden night alarm caused by firing on the ridge can be easily explained. Wearied as were the Confederate general and his men, and severe as had been the repulse of their first attack, both were undaunted and, after rest and refreshment, eager to bring the battle to a more decisive issue, and it was determined to learn long before morning whether the Federal force was on the ridge or not. During the last shower a reconnoitring party was sent out stealthily, a few of the rear-guard captured, from whom it was learned that the Union column had been on the march for hours.

Mrs. Whately was wakened and helped her disabled son to dress in haste. Little did Miss Lou know about the term *alibi*, but she had the shrewdness to show herself and to appear much alarmed. Opening her door, she gave a glimpse of herself in night attire with her long hair hanging over her shoulders, and cried, "Oh, oh, are we attacked?"

"If we are you may have sad reason to wish that you had obeyed me this morning," replied her cousin sternly. "You no more understand your folly and danger than a child. Now I'm compelled to look after my prisoners first," and he rushed away.

"Come in my room, Louise," said her aunt. "Whatever happens, it is best that we should be together." The girl was so agitated, fearing that in some way her adventures might be discovered, that she had no occasion to feign

alarm. Mrs. Whately sought only to soothe and quiet, also to extenuate her son's words. "I don't suppose we truly realize yet, as Madison does, what war means," she concluded.

Mr. Baron soon sent up word that there was no special occasion for further fears, and that the ladies might sleep, if they could, until morning.

But there was no more sleep for Mad Whately. As soon as he reached the spot where the prisoners had been kept he asked sharply, "Where is that Yankee officer and Perkins?"

The man then on duty answered, "The sergeant I relieved said that you took 'im away, sir, and that the man named Perkins followed you."

"There's been treachery here," cried Whately in a rage. "Bring that sergeant here."

The weary man was half dragged in his sleep to the officer and there thoroughly awakened by a volley of oaths. He stolidly told his story, concluding, "I cud a sworn it was you, and the overseer followed less'n three minutes after you left."

"'I left'—curse you—don't say that again. You've been fooled or was asleep and neglected your duty."

"Well, then, sir," was the dogged reply, "find that overseer who was a watchin' the Yank like a cat. Ast 'im; ast my men ef I wasn't awake en ef I didn't s'lute you soon ez you come. There's the overseer's lantern burnin' yet jis whar he left it."

At this moment Perkins came staggering toward the fire, with both hands to his head as if trying to hold it together. His clothes were muddy, his face was ghastly and he stared at Whately as if the officer was also a part of a horrid dream.

Whately seized him roughly by the arm and said sternly, "Speak, man. What does all this mean? Where's the Yank?"

"For God's sake, quit," cried Perkins. "I'm nigh dead now. You've got me in anuff trouble for one night."

"Trouble—you! What's your trouble to mine? I'm responsible for these prisoners. Now where's that Yank? Quick, or you *will* have trouble."

"I ain't seen 'im since yer took 'im away—*you*. I ain't one of your understrappers. Ez I wuz follerin' yer some one knocked me down from behind and nigh onto killed me. I jes gittin' my senses back."

Although so enraged, Whately knew that as a soldier he must curb his passion, report the facts immediately and see what could be done. His superior officer was called, all the parties questioned closely, the garden and Aun' Jinkey's cabin searched, but no new facts discovered. The old negress was savagely threatened, but she only replied, "I dunno, I dunno not'n. Wat got inter you ter tink an ole tottery, skeered ooman lak me gwine out in de dark en knock Marse Perkins on de haid?"

"Where's your grandson, Chunk?" Whately demanded fiercely.

"He des light out wid de Yankees dis eb'nin'."

The conclusion guessed at was that Scoville had been rescued by his own men, who were known to be daring scouts. In the darkness and confusion after the battle, it was thought they had mingled with the Confederates, learned the situation of their leader and the general appearance of Whately with his disabled arm. Arrayed in the Southern uniform, of which scouts always had a supply, and favored by the sleepy condition of the guard, one of the scouts had played the trick which Whately rued so bitterly. Others, on the watch, had struck down Perkins and carried Scoville off in safety. No other theory they could hit upon explained so well what was known. The tricked sergeant was placed under arrest, and Whately, who had gone to sleep with such high and mighty notions of his prowess and friendly league with fate, found himself in partial disgrace and in the depths of mortification. He kept guard over his prisoners in person the remainder of the night and again had opportunity to repent at leisure.

He mentally cursed himself as a fool, for now he remembered his mother's words. If he had shown leniency to Scoville, and brought him into the house, he might have kept the prisoner and won the goodwill of his cousin. Now, she would probably hear the humiliating facts and be less inclined either to fear or favor him. It was well that no suspicion on his part or that of others had fallen on her, for she was not one who could face coolly a severe cross-questioning.

Perkins skulked off to his house, assuaged his aching head with cold water and his wounded spirit with whiskey. As he tried to think the matter over a vague suspicion of the truth began to enter his confused brain. The little slipper with which he had been hit over the eyes in the morning now became a broad hint. He knew well, however, that it would be dangerous to make any charges, or even suggestions, unless he had ample proof.

When all became quiet again Miss Lou, in spite of deep anxieties, was overcome by extreme weariness and slept until, in a dream, she heard Scoville moaning and sighing in the extremity of physical pain. Starting up, she saw it was broad day. She passed her hand confusedly over her brow and tried to recall what had occurred, to understand the sounds which had suggested her dream. Then in a flash, the strange swirl of events in which she was involved presented itself and she knew she had wakened to other experiences beyond even her imagination. The groans of wounded men brought pitiful tears to her eyes and steadied her nerves by banishing the thought of self. Whatever might befall her, so much worse was the fate of others that already she was passing into the solemnity of spirit inspired by the presence of mortal pain and death. She drew the curtains of her window and then shrank back, shuddering and sobbing, for, scattered over the lawn, men and horses lay stark and motionless. More pitiful still, here and there a wounded horse was struggling feebly. The spring morning, dewy, bright, fragrant, made these evidences of strife

tenfold more ghastly. There could not be a more terrible indictment of war than nature's peaceful loveliness.

By the time she was dressed she was joined by Mrs. Whately, who looked serious indeed. Before they could descend to the lower hall, Madison, haggard and gloomy of aspect, intercepted them. Looking at his cousin's red eyes and pale face, he asked abruptly, "What's the matter?"

"Do you think I am accustomed to these sights and sounds?" she answered.

"Oh," he said, in a tone which seemed to her heartless, "it's an old story to me. Mother, I must speak alone with you a moment."

She turned back with him to her room, meantime saying, "Louise, I do not think you had better go down without me."

The girl tremblingly returned to her apartment, fearing that now she might be forced to confront her own actions. But she was conscious of a sort of passive courage. Mad Whately's anger, or that of others, was a little thing compared to the truth that men were dead and dying all about her.

"Mother," said her son, "I had cursed luck last night. I wish I had slept on the rain-soaked ground near my prisoners," and he told her what had happened.

"Oh, Madison!" sighed Mrs. Whately, "I wish this experience would teach you to be more guided by me. Louise cared nothing for this Yankee, except in a sort of grateful, friendly way. Through him, you could have done so much to disarm—"

"Oh, well, mother, the milk is spilled. If possible, let the whole affair be kept from her knowledge."

"Yes, I suppose that will be the best way. If she hears about it, we must try to explain by the usages of war. Now, Madison, you are cool. Let experience be your teacher, for you *must* face the truth. You must either give her up—"

"I'll never give her up."

"Then, as Major Brockton said, you must win her like a Southern gentleman. Her spirit is as high as yours. You can't continue to speak to her as you did last night and this morning. Try to realize the facts. In the seclusion of her bringing up, Louise has learned nothing of the conventionalities of society which might incline her toward a good match on general principles. So far from this, the many old-fashioned romances she has read have made her feel that she must and *will* have her romance. If you can make Louise feel that you love her so well as to become her gallant suitor, circumstances may soon give you great advantages. She may be cold and indifferent for a time, but like all passionate high-strung natures, present impulses against may turn just as strongly for you. At least, you have not to contend with that most fatal of all attitudes—indifference. A great change in you will be a flattering tribute to her power to which no girl would be indifferent. I must tell you now once for all that I will not again assist in any high-handed measures against Louise. Not only the futility of such action, but my own dignity and sense of right, forbid it. I did not understand her at first. Now that I do, I am all the more eager to call her daughter; but I wish her to feel toward me as she should in such a relation. Yesterday, when I apologized and told her that I meant to treat her with kindness and fairness, she kissed me like the warm-hearted girl she is. I will help you win her as a man should win his wife; I will not be dragged into any more false positions which can end only in humiliation. I will be your tireless ally in the only way you can succeed, but in no other."

"Very well, mother, I agree," said Whately, whose nature it was to react from one extreme to another.

"Ah, now I have hope. How is your arm?"

"It pains horribly."

Mrs. Whately went to Miss Lou's room and said, "Forgive me for keeping you waiting. Madison is almost beside himself with pain in his arm, and I will be detained a little longer."

In her immense relief that she was not charged with all she dreaded, Miss Lou had leisure from her fears to feel commiseration for her cousin. When at last he appeared she said kindly, "I am sorry you are suffering so much."

"If I thought you really cared I wouldn't mind the pain," he replied. "Cousin Lou, I owe an apology, several, I reckon, but I've been so distracted between conflicting feelings, duties and pain, that I scarcely know what I say."

"You little know me if you think I'm weighing *words* at this time," she replied. "Come, let us forget the past, shake hands and remember that we are simply cousins."

He took her hand instantly, but said, "You ask what is impossible. Suppose you had said, 'Just remember your arm is well from this moment,' would it be well? I cannot help my feelings toward you and don't wish to."

"Very well, then," she sighed, "I cannot help mine either. I don't wish to talk on that subject any more."

"Then I must plead by actions. Well, I must go now."

Mrs. Whately was much pleased, for her son was adopting just the course she desired. She added nothing and accompanied Louise downstairs.

The amputating table had been removed and the halls cleansed, but the unmistakable odor of the hospital pervaded the house. Every apartment on the first floor except the dining-room was filled with the wounded. Some were flushed and feverish by reason of their injuries, others, pallid from loss of blood and ebbing vital forces.

The Confederate general, with his staff, had already made a hasty breakfast and departed; through the open door came the mellow sound of bugles and the songs of birds, but within were irrepressible sighs and groans. Mrs. Whately entered the spacious parlor on the floor of which Confederate officers lay as close as space for attendance upon them permitted. The young girl paused on the threshold and looked around with a pitying, tearful face. A white-haired colonel was almost at her feet. As he looked up and recognized her expression, a pleased smile

illumined his wan, drawn face. "Don't be frightened, my child," he said gently.

The swift glance of her secured attention took in his condition. His right arm was gone and he appeared ghastly from loss of blood. In her deep emotion she dropped on her knees beside him, took his cold hand and kissed it as she said, "Please let me help you and others get well."

The old man was strongly touched by her unexpected action, and he faltered, "Well, my child, you make us all feel that our Southern girls are worth fighting for and, if need be, dying for. Yes, you can help us, some of us, in our dying perhaps, as well as in our mending. My battles are over. You can help best by caring for younger, stronger men."

"Such men will not begrudge you anything, sir."

"Bravo! cried half a dozen voices, and an officer near added, "Miss Baron speaks as well and true as you fought, Colonel."

She looked hastily around. Seeing many friendly smiles and looks of honest goodwill and admiration she rose confusedly, saying, "I must go to work at once."

"I think, Louise," said Mrs. Whately, joining her in the hall, we can accomplish most if we work much together and under the directions of the surgeons. It is evident from the numbers of the wounded that time, strength, food—everything will have to be used to the best advantage. I'm glad that we both got some sleep last night. Now, I insist. Before you do a thing you must have a cup of hot coffee and some nourishing food yourself. The best impulses in the world are not equal to the tasks before us. Indeed, we shall fail these poor men in their sore need if we do not keep our strength. The worst is yet to come. As far as you can, control your feelings, for emotion wears faster than work. Let's first go to the kitchen."

Zany followed from the dining-room with her hands full of dishes. She gave Miss Lou a swift, significant glance, and that was all. Even she was sobered by the scenes wit-

nessed that morning and the thought of Chunk's indefinite absence. Aun' Suke sat dozing in a corner, absolutely worn out, and other negroes from the quarters had been pressed into the service. Mrs. Baron was superintending their efforts to supply soup and such articles of diet as the surgeons had ordered. "Ole miss" now shone to advantage and had the executive ability of a general. In cool, sharp, decisive tones she gave her orders, which were obeyed promptly by assistants awed into forgetfulness of everything else except the great, solemn emergency. All differences had disappeared between the two ladies, and they began consulting at once how best to meet the prolonged demands now clearly foreseen.

"The confusion and conflicting requirements are just awful," said Mrs. Baron. "As soon as possible, we must bring about some system and order. One of the first things to do is to get as many provisions and delicacies as possible under lock and key, especially the coffee and sugar. They are going to give out anyway, before long."

Miss Lou stole away and ran to Aun' Jinkey's cabin. Soldiers had taken possession of it and were cooking and eating their breakfasts. Some recognized the girl politely as she stood at the door, while others continued their occupation in stolid indifference. Aun' Jinkey rose tottering from a corner and came to the doorstep. "You see how 'tis, honey," she said. "Dey des gwine on ez ef I ain' yere. I a hun'erd yeahs ol'er dan I wuz w'en you want sump'n ter hap'n."

"Take courage, mammy," Miss Lou whispered. "Chunk's safe. Have *you* had any breakfast?"

"I can't eat, honey, w'en ev'yting des a whirlin'."

The girl darted away and in a few moments returned with a cup of coffee. Entering the cabin, she said, "Fair play, gentlemen. This is my old mammy's cabin and this her place here in the corner by the hearth. Will you do me the favor of being kind to her and letting her remain undisturbed? Then you can use her fireplace all you please."

The Southern soldiers, understanding so well the relation between the girl and the old woman, agreed with many good-natured protestations, offering to share with Aun' Jinkey their rude breakfast.

By the time the girl had returned to the house, she found that Zany and others had prepared a second breakfast in the dining-room for the family and such of the officers whose wounds were so slight as to permit their presence at the table. Miss Lou was placed between her cousin and a young, dark-eyed officer who was introduced as Captain Maynard. He also carried his left arm in a sling.

Mrs. Whately sat in Mr. Baron's place, since he, after a night's vigils, had retired to obtain a little sleep. "Louise," said the lady, "you will have to begin being useful at once. You have a disabled man on either side of you for whom you must prepare food."

"Miss Baron," said Captain Maynard gallantly, "I am already more than reconciled to my wound. Anything that you prepare for me will be ambrosia."

Whately frowned as he heard these words and saw the immediate impression made by his cousin upon his brother officer; but a warning glance from his mother led him to vie in compliments. Before very long Maynard remarked *sotto voce*, "If you aid in healing the wounds made by the Yanks, Miss Baron, who will heal the wounds *you* make?"

"I shall not make any, sir. Such thoughts, even in jest, wound me at this time. Please excuse me, I've had all the breakfast I wish, and I cannot rest till I am doing something for those who are suffering so much."

He rose instantly and drew back her chair. In sitting down again, he encountered Whately's eyes, and recognized the jealousy and anger already excited.

CHAPTER XXV

A TRIBUTE TO A SOUTHERN GIRL

MISS LOU entered upon her duties as hospital nurse at once. Untrammelled even by the knowledge of conventionalities, and with the directness and fearlessness of a brave child, she went from one to another, her diffidence quickly banished by her profound sympathy. The enlisted men on the piazzas received her chief attentions, nor was she long in discovering the Federal wounded, crowding the outbuildings and offices.

With the exception of a rearguard and hospital attendants, the Confederate forces had marched in pursuit of the Union column. The dead were buried during the morning and the ghastlier evidences of strife removed. Along the edge of the grove tents were pitched, some designed for the soldiers, others for the better accommodation and isolation of certain critical cases. The negroes performed most of the labor, Uncle Lusthah counselling patience and quiet acceptance of their lot for the present. The prisoners were sent South. Confederate surgeon Ackley was in charge of the hospital, while upon Whately was conferred the military command. His partial disablement would not prevent him from attending to the light duties of the position, the surgeon being practically the superior officer. Order was quickly restored, guards set at important points, and the strangely assorted little community passed speedily under a simple yet rigorous military government. Curiosity, desire of gain, as well as sympathy, led people to flock to the plantation from far and near. One of Surgeon Ackley's

first steps was to impress upon all the need of provisions, for Mr. Baron's larder, ample as it had been, was speedily exhausted. During the day began the transfer of the slightly wounded to the nearest railroad town, where supplies could be obtained with more certainty, and it was evident that the policy of abandoning the remote plantation as soon as possible had been adopted.

Miss Lou knew nothing of this, and simply became absorbed in successive tasks for the time being.

"Miss Baron," said Surgeon Ackley, "a number of the men are so disabled that they cannot feed themselves. Proper food at the right time usually means life."

These words suggested what became one of her principal duties. At first, rough men were surprised and grateful indeed to find fair young girl kneeling beside them with a bowl of hot soup; then they began to look for her and welcome her as one who evoked their best and most chivalrous feelings. It had soon been evident to her that the wounded officers in the house would receive the most careful attention from the regularly appointed attendants and also from Mrs. Whately. With the exception of the old colonel, she gradually began to devote the most of her time to the enlisted men, finding among them much less embarrassment in her labors. With the latter class among the Confederates, there was not on either side a consciousness of social equality or an effort to maintain its amenities. The relation was the simple one of kindness bestowed and received.

The girl made the acquaintance of the Union wounded with feelings in which doubt, curiosity and sympathy were strangely blended. Her regard for Scoville added to her peculiar interest in his compatriots. They were the enemies of whom she had heard so much, having been represented as more alien and foreign than if they had come across the seas and spoke a different tongue. How they would receive her had been an anxious query from the first, but she quickly learned that her touch of kindness made them kin—that they welcomed her in the same spirit as did

her own people, while they also were animated by like curiosity and wondering interest in regard to herself. A woman's presence in a field hospital was in itself strange and unexpected. That this woman should be a Southern girl, whose lovely features were gentle in commiseration, instead of rigid from an imperious sense of duty to foes, was a truth scarcely accepted at first. Its fuller comprehension began to evoke a homage which troubled the girl. She was too simple and honest to accept such return for what seemed the natural offices of humanity; yet, while her manner and words checked its expression, they only deepened the feeling.

At first she could scarcely distinguish among the bronzed, begrimed faces, but before the day passed there were those whose needs and personal traits enlisted her special regard. This was true of one middle-aged Union captain, to whom at first she had no call to speak, for apparently he was not very seriously wounded. Even before his face was cleansed from the smoke and dust of battle his large, dark eyes and magnificent black beard caught her attention. Later on, when feeding a helpless man near him, he spoke to her and held out a photograph. She took it and saw the features of a blond young girl scarcely as old as herself.

"My little girl," said the officer simply. "See how she resembles her mother. That's one reason why I so idolize her," and he handed Miss Lou another picture, that of a sweet, motherly face, to which the former likeness bore the resemblance of bud to blossom.

"We must try to get you well soon, so that you may go back to them," said Miss Lou cordially. "You are not seriously hurt, I hope?"

"No, I think not. I wanted you to see them so you can imagine how they will look when I tell them about you. I don't need to be reminded of my little Sadie, but I almost see her when you come among us, and I think her blue eyes would have much the same expression as yours. God bless you, for you are blessing those whom you regard as your enemies. We don't look very hostile though, do we?"

"It seems a terrible mistake that you should be here at all as enemies," she replied. "I have been taught to dread your coming more than if you were Indians. I never can understand why men who carry such pictures as these next their heart can fight against us."

"Well, Miss Baron, you must try to believe that we would not have left the dear originals of such pictures unless we had felt we must, and there let the question rest. Our lives are sweet to us, although we risk them, chiefly because so dear to those at home. Let the thought cheer you in your work that you are keeping tears from eyes as good and kind as your own. That's another reason why I showed you the likenesses."

"It will be but another motive," she said. "A suffering man, whether friend or enemy, is enough."

She smiled as she spoke, then picked her way across the wide barn floor and disappeared. Every eye followed her, pain all forgotten for the moment.

"By G—d!" exclaimed a rough fellow, drawing his sleeve across his eyes, "I'm hard hit, but I'll crawl to and choke the first man who says a word she oughtn't to hear when she's around."

"If you can keep your own tongue civil, Yarry, you'll have your hands full," said a comrade.

"Well, I be blankety blank-blanked if that girl doesn't rout the devil out of a fellow, hoof and horns."

"You're right, my man," said the Union captain, "and your feelings do you credit. Now I have a suggestion to make. Not one of us is capable of using a word before her that she shouldn't hear, if not out of our heads. We can pay her a better tribute than that. Let us decide to speak in her absence as if she were present. That's about all we can do in return for her kindness. She won't know the cost to us in breaking habits, but we will, and that's better. We all feel that we'd like to spill some more of our blood for the girl who fed Phillips yonder as if he were a baby. Well, let us do the only thing we can—speak

as if our mothers heard us all the time, for this girl's sake."

"I be blanked if I don't agree, and may the devil fly away with the man who doesn't," cried Yarry.

"Ah, Yarry," said the captain, laughing, "you'll have the hardest row of any of us to hoe. We'll have to let you off for some slips."

Then began among the majority a harder fight than that for life—a fight with inveterate habit, an effort to change vernacular, almost as difficult as the learning of a new language. For some time Miss Lou did not know nor understand. Word had been passed to other and smaller groups of the Union wounded in other buildings. The pledge was soon known as "A Northern Tribute to a Southern Girl." It was entered into with enthusiasm and kept with a pathetic effort which many will not understand. Yarry positively began to fail under the restraint he imposed upon himself. His wound caused him agony, and profanity would have been his natural expression of even slight annoyance. All day long grisly oaths rose to his lips. Now and then an excruciating twinge would cause a half-uttered expletive to burst forth like a projectile. A deep groan would follow, as the man became rigid in his struggle for self-control.

"Yarry," cried Captain Hanfield, who had suggested the pledge, "let yourself go, for God's sake. You have shown more heroism to-day than I in all my life. We will make you an exception and put you on parole to hold in only while Miss Baron is here."

"I be—oh, blank it! This is going to be the death of me, boys. The Rebs gave me hell with this wound. But for God's sake don't let her know. Just let her think I'm civil like the rest of you. Wouldn't she open them blue eyes if she knew a man was dyin', just holdin' in cussin' on her account. Ha, ha, ha! She'd think I was a sort of a Yankee devil, worse than the Injins she expected. Don't let her know. I'll be quiet enough before long. Then like

enough she'd look at me and say, 'Poor fellow! he won't make any more trouble.' "

Whately had a busy day and felt that he had a reputation to regain. He therefore bravely endured much physical pain in his arm and gave very close attention to duty. Captain Maynard, on the contrary, had nothing to do, and his wound was only severe enough to make him restless. The young girl whom he had met at breakfast at once became by far the most interesting subject for thought and object of observation. He was a young fellow of the ordinary romantic type, hasty, susceptible, as ready to fight as to eat, and possessed of the idea that the way to win a girl was to appear her smitten, abject slave. The passing hours were ages to him in contrast to his previous activity, and as he watched Miss Lou going about on her errands of mercy he quickly passed from one stage to another of admiration and idealization. Remembering the look that Whately had given him in the morning, he maintained a distant attitude at first, thinking his brother officer had claims which he must respect. As he wandered uneasily around, however, he discovered virtually how matters stood, and learned of the attempt which Whately had made to marry his cousin, *nolens volens*. This fact piqued his interest deeply and satisfied him that the way was clear for a suit on his part were he so inclined. Fair rivalry would give only additional zest, and he promptly yielded to his inclination to become at least much better acquainted with the girl. At dinner he and Whately vied in their gallantries, but she was too sad and weary to pay much attention to either of them.

Mrs. Whately compelled her to lie down for a time during the heat of the afternoon, but thoughts of the suffering all about her banished power to rest. She went down and found the old colonel lying with closed eyes, feebly trying to keep away the pestering flies. Remembering the bunch of peacock feathers with which Zany, in old monotonous days, had waved when waiting on the table, she obtained it from the dining-room, and sitting down noiselessly by

the officer, gave him a respite from his tormentors. In his drowsiness he did not open his eyes, but passed into quiet sleep. The girl maintained her watch, putting her finger to her lips and making signals for silence to all who came near. Other Confederate officers observed her wistfully; Mad Whately, coming in, looked at her frowningly. His desire and purpose toward his cousin had been that of entire self-appropriation and now she was becoming the cynosure of many eyes. Among them he saw those of Captain Maynard, who was already an object of hate. Little recked the enamored captain of this fact. To his ardent fancy the girl was rapidly becoming ideal in goodness and beauty. With the ready egotism of the young he was inclined to believe that fate had brought about the events which had revealed to him the woman he should marry. A bombshell bursting among them all would not have created a greater sensation than the knowledge that the girl's thoughts were following a Yankee, one whom she herself, by daring stratagem, had released from captivity.

A twinge of pain awakened the colonel and he looked up, dazed and uncomprehending. Miss Lou bent over him and said gently, "Go to sleep again. It's all right."

"Oh, I remember now. You are Miss Baron."

"Yes, but don't try to talk; just sleep now that you can."

He smiled and yielded.

A few moments later Maynard came forward and said, "Miss Baron, your arm must be tired. Let me take your place."

Now she rewarded him by a smile. "I will be glad if you can," she replied softly, "not that I am very tired, but there are so many others."

As she moved away, she saw Surgeon Ackley beckoning to her. "Miss Baron," he said, "I am going to put one of my patients especially in your and your aunt's charge. Young as he is, he is a hero and an unusual character. I have had him moved to a tent, for he is in a very critical condition. Indeed, his chances for life are few and he

knows it. I am acquainted with his family—one of the best in the South."

He led the way to a small tent beneath the shade of a wide-branched oak. A stretcher had been extemporized into a camp bed and on it lay a youth not older apparently than the girl herself. His face had the blood-drained look which many will remember, yet was still fine in its strong, boyish lines. The down on his upper lip was scarcely more deeply defined than his straight eyebrows. A negro attendant sat near fanning him, and Miss Lou first thought that he was asleep. As she approached with the surgeon he opened his eyes with the dazed expression so common when the brain is enfeebled from loss of blood. At first they seemed almost opaque and dead in their blackness, but, as if a light were approaching from within, they grew bright and laughing. His smile showed his white, even teeth slightly, and her look of deep commiseration passed into one of wonder as she saw his face growing positively radiant with what seemed to her a strange kind of happiness, as he glanced back and forth from her to the surgeon. Feebly he raised his finger to his lips as if to say, "I can't speak."

"That's right, Waldo; don't try to talk yet. This is Miss Baron. She will be one of your nurses and will feed you with the best of soup. We'll bring you round yet."

He shook his head and smiled more genially, then tried to extend his hand to the girl, looking his welcome and acceptance of her ministry. So joyous was his expression that she could not help smiling in return, but it was the questioning, doubtful smile of one who did not understand.

"When she comes," resumed Ackley, "take what she gives you, but don't talk until I give permission. That will do now. You must take everything except quiet in small quantities at first."

His lips formed the words "All right," and smilingly he watched them depart.

"I suppose he is not exactly in his right mind," said Miss Lou as she and the surgeon returned to the house.

"Many would think so, I reckon," replied Ackley laconically. "He believes in a heaven and that he's going there. That's the only queer thing I ever discovered in Waldo. He's worth a lot of trouble, Miss Baron."

"It would be right strange if I did not do my best for him, sir."

"I thought you'd feel so. I want very strong beef soup made for a few such special cases, who can take but little at a time. I would like him to have a few teaspoonfuls every two hours. I am going to trust to you and Mrs. Whately chiefly to look after him in this respect. We can do little more than help nature in his case."

Poor Aun' Suke was getting weary again, but she had a heart which Miss Lou speedily touched in behalf of her patient, and a special saucepan was soon bubbling over the fire.

The soup for the evening meal being ready, she began again her task of feeding the helpless soldiers, visiting, among others, Phillips, who lay in a half-stupor on the great barn-floor. As she stepped in among the Federal wounded, she was again impressed by the prevailing quiet and by the friendly glances turned toward her on every side. The Union surgeon in charge lifted his hat politely, while such of the men as were able took off theirs and remained uncovered. The homage, although quiet, was so marked that she was again embarrassed, and with downcast eyes went direct to Phillips, gently roused him and gave him his supper. While she was doing this the men around her were either silent or spoke in low tones. The thought grew in her mind, "How these Northern soldiers have been misrepresented to me! Even when I am approaching and before they are aware I am near, I hear no rough talk as I do among our men. The world is so different from uncle's idea of it! Whether these men are right or wrong, I will never listen patiently again when they are spoken of as the scum of the earth."

As she rose and saw the respectful attitude toward her,

she faltered, "I—I—wish to thank you for your—your kindness to me."

At these words there was a general smile even on the wannest and most pain-pinched face, for they struck the men as very droll.

"We were under the impression that the kindness was chiefly on your side," said Captain Hanfield. "Still we are glad you find us a civil lot of Indians."

"Please remember," she answered earnestly, "that was not my thought, but one impressed upon me by those who did not know. Only within a very short time have I ever seen Northern people or soldiers, and they treat me with nothing but courtesy."

"Perhaps you are to blame for that," said the captain pleasantly.

"I can't help feeling glad that our good opinion is becoming mutual," she replied, smiling. "Won't you please put on your hats and let me come and go as a matter of course? I don't like to be sort of *received* every time I come. I just want to help those I can help, to get well."

"You have only to express your wishes, Miss Baron," was the hearty reply.

"Thank you. Is there anything more that I can do for you? Is there any one who specially needs—"

As she was glancing round her eyes fell upon Yarry. His face was so drawn and haggard with pain that, from an impulse of pity, she went directly to him and said gently, "I fear, sir, you are suffering very much."

"I be—oh, hang—there, there, miss, I'll stand it a little longer. I could stand hell-fire for your sake. I didn't mean to say that. Guess I better keep still."

His face, now seen attentively, revealed more to her in tuition than his words. She stooped by his side and said piteously, "Oh, you are suffering—I *feel* that you are suffering terribly. I must do something to relieve you."

"Oh, now, miss," he replied, forcing a ghastly sort of smile, "I'm all right, I be —— well, I am. Bless your kind

heart! Don't worry about me. I'll smoke my pipe and go to sleep pretty soon. You look tired yourself, little one. I will feel better if you won't worry about me, I be —— well, I will. I'm just like the other fellows, you know."

"I reckon you are a brave, good-hearted man, to think of others when I *know* you are suffering so much. I am having very strong soup made for one of our men, and I'll bring you some by and by," and with a lingering, troubled look into his rugged face, she departed.

His eyes followed her until she disappeared.

"Yarry, you are rewarded," Captain Hanfield remarked.

" —— my reward. Fellers, she's just wearin' herself out for us. I don't want no reward for anything I can do for her. Well, I'm goin' to shut up now. The only thing I can do for her is to hold my tongue till it can't wag. I told her I'd smoke my pipe and go to sleep. I be —— well, I will. Light it for me, Tom. When she comes, like enough I'll be asleep, a sort of *dead* sleep, yer know. Just let her think I'm dozin' after my pipe. Don't let her try to wake me and worry about me."

"All shall be as you wish, Yarry," said Captain Hanfield. "I tell you, men, few women ever received such a tribute as Yarry is paying this Southern girl. For one, I'm proud of him."

CHAPTER XXVI

A BACKGROUND OF EGOTISM

WHEN Miss Lou returned to the house supper was ready and she sat down weary, saddened and preoccupied by the scenes she had witnessed.

"You are going beyond your strength," said Captain Maynard, who had watched her coming back from the Federal wounded. "Cannot you be content to confine your ministrations to your friends only?"

"For once I can agree with Captain Maynard," Whately added stiffly. "I don't think it's right for you, cousin, to be going among those rough, brutal fellows."

Instantly her anger flamed at the injustice of the remark and she answered hotly, "I've found no rough, brutal fellows among the Yankees."

All smiled at her words, and Ackley remarked to one of the Union surgeons, "Dr. Borden, I thought our men could hold their own pretty well with the Army in Flanders, but you Yanks, I reckon, surpass all military organizations, past or present. There was one man especially who fairly made the night lurid and left a sulphurous odor after him when he was brought in. It would be rather rough on us all if we were where he consigned us with a vim that was startling. I certainly hope that Miss Baron is not compelled to hear any such language."

"I appeal to Miss Baron herself," said Dr. Borden, "if she has been offended in this respect to-day?"

"No, indeed, I have not," replied the girl indignantly. "I never was treated with more courtesy. I have not heard

a rough word from the Yankees even when they did not know I was near, and that is more than I can say of our own men. Fight the Yankees all you please, but don't do them injustice."

In spite of the girl's flushed, incensed face, there was an explosion of laughter. "Pardon me, Miss Baron," said Ackley, "but you can't know how droll your idea of injustice to the Yankees seems to us. That you have such an idea, however, is a credit to you and to them also, for they must have been behaving themselves prodigiously."

"Yes, Dr. Ackley," replied Borden emphatically, "Miss Baron's impressions *are* a credit to her and to my patients. They promptly recognized her motives and character, and for her sake they pledged themselves that while here, where she is one of the nurses, they would not use language at any time which they would not have their mothers hear. That very man you speak of, who swore so last night, believes himself dying from his effort at self-restraint. This is not true, for he would have died anyhow, but his death is hastened by his effort. He has been in agony all day. Opiates make him worse, so there is no use of giving them. But I can tell you, no man in your Confederacy ever did a braver thing than he is doing this minute to show his respect for this young lady who has shown kindness to his comrades. I can assure you, Lieutenant Whately, that you need have no fears about your cousin when visiting my patients."

"What's the name of the soldier of whom you speak?" Miss Lou asked eagerly.

"He is called Yarry. I don't know any other name yet —been so busy dressing wounds."

"Thank you," faltered the girl, rising, her face showing signs of strong emotion.

"Oh, Louise! finish your supper," expostulated Mrs. Whately. "You must not let these scenes take so strong a hold"—but she was out of hearing. "I fear it's all going to be too much for her," sighed the lady in conclusion.

Mr. Baron and his wife exchanged grim glances from the head and foot of the table, as much as to say, "She has shaken off our control and we are not responsible," but Ackley remarked, "I agree with you, Dr. Borden, that it's fine to see a girl show such a spirit, and I congratulate you that your men are capable of appreciating it. By the way, Mrs. Whately, I have put her, with you, in charge of young Waldo and truly hope that among us we can bring him through."

"Mrs. Whately," said Captain Maynard, "I reckon more than one of us begin to regret already that we were not so desperately wounded as to need your attention and that of Miss Baron. We must remember, however, that she is not accustomed to these scenes, and I think we must try to make her forget them at the table. I suppose in the kindness of her heart she is now crying in her room over that Yankee."

Whately shot a savage glance at the speaker which plainly implied, "It's none of your business where she is." Suddenly rising, he departed also, his mother's eyes following him anxiously.

Miss Lou was not crying in her room. As the level rays of the sun shone into the wide old barn, making the straw in a mow doubly golden, and transforming even the dusty cobwebs into fairy lacework, she crossed the threshold and paused for the first time in her impulsive haste to find and thank the dying man of whom she had been told. All eyes turned wonderingly toward her as she stood for a moment in the sunshine, as unconscious of herself, of the marvellous touch of beauty bestowed by the light and her expression, as if she had flown from the skies.

"Is there a soldier here named Yarry?" she began, then uttered a little inarticulate cry as she saw Captain Hanfield kneeling beside a man to whom all eyes directed her. "Oh, it's he," she sobbed, kneeling beside him also. "As soon as I heard I felt it was he who told me not to worry about him. Is—is he really dying?"

"Yes, I hope so, Miss Baron," replied the captain gravely. "He couldn't live and it's time he had rest."

The girl bent over the man, her hot tears falling on his face. He opened his eyes and looked vacantly at her for a moment or two, then smiled in recognition. It was the most pathetic smile she had ever imagined. "Don't worry," he whispered, "I'm just dozin' off."

"Oh, my poor, brave hero!" she said brokenly, "I know, I know it all. God reward you, I can't."

"Don't want no reward. I be—say, miss, don't wear—yourself—out fer us."

She took his cold hand and bowed her forehead upon it, sobbing aloud in the overpowering sense of his self-forgetfulness. "O God!" she cried, "do for this brave, unselfish man what I cannot. When, *when* can I forget such a thing as this! Oh, live, please live; we will take such good care of you."

"There, there, little one, don't—take on—so about—me. Ain't wuth it. I be— Say, I feel better—easier. Glad—you spoke—good word to God—for me. I be—I mean, I think—He'll hear—sech as you. I'm—off now. Don't—wear—yourself—"

Even in her inexperience she saw that he was dying, and when his gasping utterance ceased she had so supported his head that it fell back on her bosom. For a few moments she just cried helplessly, blinded with tears. Then she felt the burden of his head removed and herself lifted gently.

"I suspected something like this when you left the table, Miss Baron," said Dr. Borden.

"Oh, oh, oh, I feel as if he had died for me," she sobbed.

"He would a died for you, miss," said Tom, drawing his sleeve across his eyes, "so would we all."

"Miss Baron," resumed the doctor gravely, "remember poor Yarry's last words, 'Don't wear yourself'—he couldn't finish the sentence, but you know what he meant. You must grant the request of one who tried to do what he could for you. As a physician also I must warn you to rest

until morning. You can do more for these men and others by first doing as Yarry wished," and he led her away.

They had not gone far before they met Uncle Lusthah. The girl stopped and said, "Doctor, won't you let Uncle Lusthah bury him to-morrow down by the run? I'll show him the place."

"Yes, Miss Baron, we all will do anything you wish if you only rest to-night. I tell you frankly you endanger yourself and your chance to do anything more for the wounded by continuing the strain which these scenes put upon you."

"I reckon you're right," she said, "I feel as if I could hardly stand."

"I know. Take my arm and go at once to your room."

On the way they encountered Whately. "Cousin! where on earth have you been? You look ready to faint."

His presence and all that he implied began to steady her nerves at once, but she made no reply.

"She has witnessed a painful scene, Lieutenant," began the surgeon.

"You have no business to permit her to witness such scenes," Whately interrupted sternly. "You should see that she's little more than an inexperienced child and—"

"Hush, sir," said Miss Lou. "Who has given you the right to dictate to me or to this gentleman? I'm in no mood for any more such words, cousin. To-day, at least, no one has taken advantage of my inexperience. Good-evening," and she passed on, leaving him chafing in impatient anger and protest.

At the house Mrs. Whately began expostulations also, but the girl said, "Please don't talk to me now. By and by I will tell you what will touch all the woman in your heart."

"I earnestly suggest," added Dr. Borden, "that you take Miss Baron to her room, and that nothing more be said to disturb her. She is overwrought and has reached the limit of endurance."

The lady had the tact to acquiesce at once. After reaching her room Miss Lou exclaimed, "But I have not been to young Waldo."

"I have," replied her aunt, "and will see him again more than once before I retire. Louise, if you would not become a burden yourself at this time you must do as the doctor says."

Within an hour the girl was sleeping and her nature regaining the strength and elasticity of youth.

As Whately stood fuming where his cousin had left him, Perkins approached for the first time since they had parted in anger the night before.

"I reck'n Miss Baron's gone over ter the inemy," remarked the overseer.

"What do you mean?"

"Look yere, Leftenant, what's the use o' you bein' so gunpowdery with me? What's the use, I say? I mout be of some use ter you ef you wuz civil."

"Of what use were you last night? You allowed my prisoner to be carried off right under your nose."

"Who carried 'im off? Answer that."

"Why, some gawk of a Yank that you were too stupid to tell from me."

"P'raps hit was, p'raps hit wasn't."

"Who else could it be?"

"I s'picion who it was, but I'm not goin' ter talk to one who's got nothin' better to give me 'n uggly words."

"You don't mean to say—"

"I don't mean to say nothin' till I know who I'm talkin' ter."

Whately gave a long, low whistle and then muttered "Impossible!"

"Oh, sut'ny," remarked Perkins ironically.

The two men gave each other a long searching look; then Perkins resumed, "That's right, Leftenant, take yer bearin's. I don't see ez you kin do me any special good, ner harm nuther. Ef yer want no news or help from me, we kin sheer off right yere en now."

"I say your suspicion is absurd," resumed Whately, as if arguing with himself. "When the alarm, caused by firing, came last night, it happened she was in her room and was badly frightened."

"What time did the alarm happen?"

"About two o'clock."

"Wal, about midnight a figger that favored you 'mazingly, yes, ter yer very walk, came up boldly en sez ter me, nodding at the Yank, 'Leave 'im ter me.' The figger wasn't jes' dressed like you in 'Federate uniform, but I kin a'most swear the figger had on them clo's and that hat you're a wearin' now; arm in sling, too. What's mo', when I thought hit over I was cock sure the figger wuz shorter'n you air. I don't believe there's a Yank livin' that could a fooled me last night, 'less he had yer clo's on en yer walk."

"My uniform and hat hung on the chairs beside me, just where they had been put when I went to sleep."

"Jes' tell me ef the do' o' yer room wuz locked."

"I wasn't in a room. I slept at the end of the hall."

"Then enybody could git 'em en put 'em back while you wuz asleep."

"She couldn't knock you senseless. You're talking wild."

"I've schemed that out. Thar's tracks in the gyardin not so blinded but they kin give a hint ter a blind hoss. Thar's a track nigh whar I fell mighty like what that infernal nigger Chunk ud make. Beyond, ez ef some uns had hidden in the bushes, right in the gyarden bed, air two little woman-like tracks en two men tracks."

Whately ground his teeth and muttered an oath.

"I don't s'pose I kin prove anything 'clusive," resumed Perkins, "en I don't s'pose it ud be best ef I could. Ef she was up ter such deviltry, of co'se you don't want hit gen'ly known. Bigger ossifers 'n you ud have ter notice it. Ef I was in yu shoes howsomever, in huntin' shy game, I could use sech a clar s'picion agin her en be mo' on my gyard inter the bargain."

"I can use it and will," said Whately, sternly. "Perkins, keep your eyes wide open in my behalf. If that Yankee or Chunk ever come within our reach again—the nigger stole my horse and brought the Yank here too in time to prevent the wedding, I believe."

"Reck'n he did, Leftenant."

"Well, he and his master may be within our reach again. We had better not be seen much together. I will reward you well for any real service," and he strode away in strong perturbation.

"Hang your reward," muttered Perkins. "You think you're goin' ter use me when the boot's on t'other foot. You shall pay me fer doin' my work. I couldn't wish the gal nuthin' worse than ter marry you. That ud satisfy my grudge agin her, but ef I get my claws on that nigger en dom'neerin' Yank of a master"—his teeth came together after the grim fashion of a bulldog, by way of completing his soliloquy.

The spring evening deepened from twilight into dusk, the moon rose and shone with mild radiance over the scene that had abounded in gloom, tragedy and adventure the night before. The conflict which then had taken place now caused the pathetic life-and-death struggles occurring in and about the old mansion. In the onset of battle muscle and the impulse to destroy dominated; now the heart, with its deep longings, its memories of home and kindred, the soul with its solemn thoughts of an unknown phase of life which might be near, came to the fore, rendering the long, doubtful struggle complex indeed.

The stillness was broken only by the steps and voices of attendants and the irrepressible groans of those who watched for the day with hope that waxed and waned as the case might be. Uncle Lusthah yearned over the Federal wounded with a great pity, the impression that they were suffering for him and his people banishing sleep. He hovered among them all night long, bringing water to fevered lips and saying a word of Christian cheer to any who would listen.

Miss Lou wakened with the dawn and recognized with gladness that her strength and courage for work had been restored. Even more potent than thoughts of Scoville was the impulse to be at work again, especially among those with whom she inevitably associated him. Dressing hastily, she went first to see the old Confederate colonel. He was evidently failing fast. Ackley and an attendant were watching him. He looked at the girl, smiled and held out his hand. She took it and sat down beside him.

"Ah!" he said feebly, "this is a good deal better than dying alone. Would you mind, my child, writing some things I would like to say to my family?"

Miss Lou brought her portfolio and tearfully received his dying messages.

"Poor little girl!" said the colonel, "you are witnessing scenes very strange to you. Try to keep your heart tender and womanly, no matter what you see. Such tears as yours reveal the power to help and bless, not weakness. I can say to *you* all the sacred, farewell words which would be hard to speak to others."

Brokenly, with many pauses from weakness, he dictated his last letter, and she wrote his words as well as she could see to do so. "They will be all the sweeter and more soothing for your tears, my dear," he said.

He kept up with wonderful composure until he came to his message to "little Hal," his youngest child. Then the old soldier broke down and reached out his arms in vain yet irrepressible longing. "Oh, if I could kiss the little fellow just once before—" he moaned.

For a few moments he and the girl at his side just wept together, and then the old man said almost sternly, "Tell him to honor his mother and his God, to live for the South, for which his father died. Say, if he will do this he shall have my blessing, not without. Now, my child, I trust this letter to you. Good-by and God bless you. I wish to be alone a little while and face the last enemy calmly."

As she knelt down and kissed him tears again rushed to

his eyes and he murmured, "That was good and sweet of you, my child. Keep your heart simple and tender as it is now. Good-by."

Returning to her room with the portfolio she met her cousin in the upper hall. He fixed his eyes searchingly upon her and with the air of one who knew very much began, "Cousin Lou, my eyes are not so often blinded with tears as yours, yet they see more perhaps than you are aware of. I'm willing to woo you as gallantly as can any man, but you've got to keep some faith with me as the representative of our house and of the cause which, as a Southern girl, should be first always in its claims."

Her heart fluttered, for his words suggested both knowledge and a menace. At the same time the scenes she had passed through, especially the last, lifted her so far above his plane of life that she shrank from him with something very like contempt.

"Do you know what I have been writing?" she asked sternly.

"I neither know nor care. I only wish you to understand that you cannot trifle with me nor wrong me with impunity."

"Oh!" she cried, with a strong repellant gesture, "why can't *you* see and understand? You fairly make me loathe the egotism which, in scenes like these, can think only of self. As if I had either time or inclination to be trifling with you, whatever you mean by that. Brave men are dying heroically and unselfishly, thinking of others, while 'I, me and gallant wooing,' combined with vague threats against one whom you are in honor bound to protect, are the only words on your lips. How can you be so unmanly? What are you, compared with that noble old colonel whose last words I have just received? If you care a straw for my opinion, why are you so foolish as to compel me to draw comparisons? Do, for manhood's sake, forget yourself for once."

He was almost livid from rage as he replied harshly, "You'll rue these words!"

She looked at him scornfully as she said, "It's strange, but your words and expression remind me of Perkins. He might make you a good ally."

In his confusion and anger he blurted out, "Little wonder you think of him. You and that accursed nigger, Chunk—"

"Hush!" she interrupted in a low, imperious voice, "hush, lest as representative of our house you disgrace yourself beyond hope." And she passed quickly to her room.

Within less than an hour he was asking himself in bitter self-upbraiding, "What have I gained? What can I do? Prefer charges against my own cousin which I cannot prove? Impossible! Oh, I've been a fool again. I should have kept that knowledge secret till I could use it for a definite purpose. I'll break her spirit yet."

If he had seen her after she reached her room he might have thought it broken then. Vague dread of the consequences of an act which, from his words, she believed he knew far more about than he did, mingled with her anger and feelings of repugnance. "Oh," she moaned, "it was just horrible; it was coming straight down from the sublime to the contemptible. That noble old colonel took me to the very gate of heaven. Now I'm fairly trembling with passion and fear. Oh, why will Cousin Mad always stir up the very worst of my feelings! I'd rather suffer and die as poor Yarry did than marry a man who *will* think only of his little self at such a time as this!"

CHAPTER XXVII

AUN' JINKEY'S SUPREME TEST

THE first long tragic day of hospital experience had so absorbed Miss Lou as to relegate into the background events which a short time before had been beyond her wildest dreams. In the utter negation of her life she had wished that something would happen, and so much had happened and so swiftly that she was bewildered. The strangest thing of all was the change in herself. Lovers of the Whately and Maynard type could only repel by their tactics. She was too high-spirited to submit to the one, and too simple and sincere, still too much of a child, to feel anything but annoyance at the sentimental gallantry of the other. The genial spirit of comradeship in Scoville, could it have been maintained through months of ordinary life, would probably have prepared the way for deeper feeling on the part of both, but there had been no time for the gradual development of goodwill and friendly understanding into something more. They had been caught in an unexpected whirl of events and swept forward into relations utterly unforeseen. He owed his escape from much dreaded captivity and his very life to her, and, as he had said, these facts, to her generous nature, were even more powerful in their influence than if she herself had received the priceless favors. At the same time, her course toward him, dictated at first by mere humanity, then goodwill, had made his regard for her seem natural even to her girlish heart. If she had read it all in a book, years before, she would have said, "A man couldn't do less than love one when fortune had enabled her to do so much for him." So she had simply

approved of his declaration, down by the run, of affection for which she was not yet ready, and she approved of him all the more fondly because he did not passionately and arbitrarily demand or expect that she should feel as he did, in return. "I didn't," she had said to herself a score of times, "and that was enough for him."

When later, for his sake, she faced the darkness of midnight, a peril she dared not contemplate, and the cruel misjudgment which would follow her action if discovered, something deeper awoke in her nature—something kindled into strong, perplexing life when, in his passionate gratitude, he had snatched her in his arms and, as she had said, "given her his whole heart because he couldn't help himself." From that moment, on her part there had been no more merely kind, tranquil thoughts about Scoville, but a shy, trembling, blushing self-consciousness even when in solitude his image rose before her.

As she sought to regain composure after the last interview with her cousin, and to think of her best course in view of what seemed his dangerous knowledge, a truth, kept back thus far by solemn and absorbing scenes, suddenly became dear to her. The spirit of all-consuming selfishness again manifested by Whately, revealed as never before the gulf of abject misery into which she would have fallen as his wife. "If it hadn't been for Lieutenant Scoville I might now have been his despairing bond slave," she thought; "I might have been any way if the Northern officer were any other kind of a man, brutal, coarse, as I had been led to expect, or even indifferent and stupid. I might have been forced into relations from which I could not escape and then have learned afterward what noble, unselfish men there are in the world. Oh, I *could* marry Allan Scoville, I could love him and devote my life to him wholly, knowing all the time that I needn't protect myself, because he would always be a kinder, truer, better protector. How little I have done for him compared with that from which he has saved me!"

There was a knock at the door and Zany quickly entered. "I des slip off while ole miss in de sto'-room, ter gib you a warnin', Miss Lou. Hain't had no charnce till dis minit. Dat ar ole fox, Perkins, been snoopin' roun' yistidy arter we un's tracks en las' night he tell Mad Whately a heap ob his 'jecterin'."

"But, Zany," said Miss Lou, "you don't think they *know* anything."

"Reck'n hit's all des 'jecterin'," Zany replied. "Kyant be nufin' else. We des got ter face hit out. Doan you fear on me. We uns mus' des star stupid-like ef dey ax questions," and she whisked off again.

The girl felt that the spirit of Zany's counsel would be the best policy to adopt. While she might not "star stupid-like," she could so coldly ignore all reference to Scoville's escape as to embarrass any one who sought to connect her with it. In the clearer consciousness of her feeling toward the Union officer her heart grew glad and strong at the thought of the service she had rendered him, nor did it shrink at suffering for his sake. A gratitude quite as strong as his own now possessed her that he had been the means of keeping her from a union dreaded even as an ignorant child, and now known, by the love which made her a woman, to be earthly perdition.

"Having escaped that," she reflected, "there's nothing else I greatly fear," and she went down to breakfast resolving that she would be so faithful in her duties as a nurse that no one in authority would listen to her cousin or Perkins if they sought to make known their surmises.

Ignorant of her son's action and its results, Mrs. Whately met her niece kindly and insisted that she should not leave the dining-room until she had partaken of the breakfast now almost ready. Captain Maynard joined her with many expressions of a solicitude which the girl felt to be very uncalled for, yet in her instinct to propitiate every one in case her action should be questioned, she was more friendly to him than at any time before. Meanwhile, she was asking

herself, "What would they do to me if all was found out?" and sustaining herself by the thought, "Whatever they do to me, they can't reach Lieutenant Scoville."

It was gall and bitterness to Whately to find her talking affably to Maynard, but before the meal was over she had the address to disarm him in some degree. For his own sake as well as hers and the family's she thought, "I must not irritate him into hasty action. If he should find out, and reveal everything, no matter what happened to me, he would bring everlasting disgrace on himself and relatives. I could at least show that my motives were good, no matter how soldiers, with their harsh laws, might act toward me; but what motive could excuse him for placing me, a young girl and his cousin, in such a position?"

Whately had already satisfied himself that no pretence of zeal for the service could conceal his real motive or save him from general scorn should he speak of the mere conjectures of a man like Perkins. He had never meant to speak of them publicly, simply to use his knowledge as a means of influencing his cousin. He now doubted the wisdom of this. Reacting from one mood to another, as usual, his chief hope now was that some unexpected turn of fortune's wheel would bring his opportunity. The one thing which all the past unfitted him to accept was personal and final denial. His egotism and impatience at being crossed began to manifest itself in another direction, one suggested by Maynard's evident susceptibility to his cousin's attractions. "Here is a chance," he thought, "of righting myself in Lou's eyes. If this fellow, thrown into her society by the fortune of war, not by courtesy, presumptuously goes beyond a certain point in his attentions, Cousin Lou will find that no knight of olden time would have fought for her quicker than I will. Mother says she is one who must have her romance. She may have it with a vengeance. It may open her eyes to the truth that a spirit like mine brooks no opposition, and when she sees that I am ready to face death for her she will admire, respect, and yield to

a nature that is haughty and like that of the old nobility."

Thus he blinded himself in these vain, silly vaporings, the result of a false training and the reading of stilted romances. The thought of studying the girl's character, of doing and being in some degree what would be agreeable to her, never occurred to him. That kind of good sense rarely does occur to the egotistical, who often fairly exasperate those whom they would please by utter blindness to the simple things which *are* pleasing. Miss Lou had read more old romances than he, but she speedily outgrew the period in which she was carried away by the fantastic heroes described. They became in her fancy the other extreme of the matter-of-fact conditions in which her uncle and aunt had lived, and as we have seen, she longed to know the actual world, to meet with people who did not seem alien to her young and natural sympathies. Each new character she met became a kind of revelation to her. She was the opposite pole of the society belle, whose eyes have wearied of humanity, who knows little and cares less for anything except her mirrored image. With something of the round-eyed curiosity and interest of a child, she looked at every new face, asking herself, "What is he like?" not whether he will like and admire me, although she had not a little feminine pleasure in discovering that strangers were inclined to do this. Her disapproval of Maynard arose chiefly from the feeling that his gallantry at such a time, with the dead and dying all about them, was "more shocking than a game of cards on Sunday." She regarded his attentions, glances, tones, as mere well-bred *persiflage*, indulged in for his own amusement, and she put him down as a trifler for his pains. That he, as she would phrase it, "was just smitten without any rhyme or reason" seemed preposterous. She had done nothing for him as she had for Scoville. The friendly or the frankly admiring looks of strangers, the hearty gratitude and goodwill of the wounded, she could accept with as much pleasure as

any of her sex; but she had not yet recognized that type of man who looks at a pretty woman and is disposed to make love to her at once. "Why does Captain Maynard stare at me so?" she asked herself, "when I don't care a thistle for him and never will. Why should I care? Why should he care? Does he think I'm silly and shallow enough to be amused by this kind of thing when that brave old colonel is dying across the hall?"

It was a relief to her to escape from him and Whately and to visit even poor Waldo, dying also, as she believed. "Dr. Ackley," she said, "you may trust me to give him his food now every two hours. I won't break down again."

"You did not break down, Miss Baron. All my nurses have their hours off. Why shouldn't you? I reckon," he added, smiling, "you'll have to obey my orders like the rest. I will go with you again on this visit."

To her the youth seemed ghastlier than ever, but the expression of gladness in his eyes was unchanged.

"Miss Baron feels very remorseful that she has not been to see you before," said Dr. Ackley, "but her labors yesterday were so many and varied that she had to rest. She will do better by you to-day."

Waldo could only reach his hand feebly toward her in welcome. She took the brown, shapely hand in both of hers and it made her sad to feel how cold and limp it was. "But a few hours ago," she thought, "it was striking blows with a heavy sabre."—"I have brought you some strong, hot soup," she said gently, "and shall bring it every two hours. You'll be very good and take it from me, won't you?"

He laughed as he nodded assent.

"When can I begin to read to him, doctor, to help him pass the time?"

"Perhaps to-morrow if he does well, but never more than a few minutes together until I permit. Slow and sure, Waldo, slow and sure are my orders, and you are too good a soldier to disobey."

He shook his head mischievously and whispered "Insubordinate."

The doctor nodded portentously and said, "If you and Miss Baron don't obey orders I'll put you both under arrest."

This seemed to amuse the young fellow immensely and he was about to speak again, but the surgeon put his finger to his lips and departed.

As she was feeding him with eyes full of gentle commiseration his lips framed the words, "You can talk to me."

She scarcely knew how to do this. There were questions she was eager to ask, for his strange, exuberant happiness under the circumstances were hard to understand, even after Dr. Ackley's explanation. She had never seen religion produce any such results. Uncle Lusthah seemed to her very sincere and greatly sustained in his faith, but he had always been to her a sorrowful, plaintive figure, mourning for lost kindred whom slavery had scattered. Like the ancient prophets also, his heart was ever burdened by the waywardness of the people whom he exhorted and warned. In young Waldo appeared a joyousness which nothing could quench. From the moment she obtained a clew to his unexpected behavior, everything in his manner accorded with the surgeon's explanation. In his boyish face and expression there was not a trace of the fanatical or abnormal. He seemed to think of Heaven as he did of his own home, and the thought of going to the one inspired much the same feeling as returning to the other.

"Well," said Miss Lou, after a little hesitancy, "it is a pleasure to wait on one who is so brave and cheerful. It makes me feel ashamed of worrying over my troubles."

He motioned her to get something under his pillow and she drew out a small Testament. With the ease of perfect familiarity he turned the leaves and pointed to the words, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He looked up at her, smiled brightly, and shook his head when he saw tears in her eyes. Again

he turned the leaves and pointed to other words, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." His expression was wonderfully significant in its content, for it was that of one who had explained and accounted for everything.

"Oh," she faltered, "I wish I felt as you do, believed as you do. I hope you will get strong soon. I would like to tell you some things which trouble me very much, and there is no one I can tell."

"By and by," he whispered. "Don't worry. All right."

"Oh, what does this mean?" she thought as she returned to the house. "Awfully wounded, suffering, dying perhaps, yet 'glad with an exceeding joy'! Uncle and aunt haven't any idea of such a religion, and for some reason Dr. Williams never gave me any such idea of it at church. Why didn't he? Was it my fault? What he said seemed just words that made little or no impression. Since he tried to marry me to Cousin Mad I feel as if I could scarcely bear the sight of him."

Yet he was the first one to greet her on the veranda. He spoke with formal kindness, but she responded merely by a grave salutation, and passed on, for she felt that he should have understood and protected her in the most terrible emergency of her young life.

Having looked after the safety of his family, he had returned with the best and sincerest intentions to minister to the wounded. If the good he would do corresponded with these intentions he would have been welcomed in most instances; but he possessed that unfortunate temperament which is only one remove for the better from a cold indifference to his sacred duties. He did not possess a particle of that mysterious, yet in his calling priceless, gift termed magnetism for the lack of a better definition. All respected him, few warmed toward him or thought of opening to him

their hearts. His mind was literal, and within it the doctrines were like labelled and separate packages, from which he took from time to time what he wanted as he would supplies from a store-room. God was to him a Sovereign and a Judge who would save a few of the human race in exact accordance with the creed of the Church in which the good man had been trained. What would happen to those without its pale was one of those solemn mysteries with which he had naught to do. Conscientious in his idea of duty to the last degree, he nevertheless might easily irritate and repel many minds by a rigid presentation of the only formula of faith which he deemed safe and adequate. It seemed his chief aim to have every form and ceremony of his Church complied with, and then his responsibility ceased. He and Mr. Baron had taken solid comfort in each other, both agreeing on every point of doctrine and politics. Both men honestly felt that if the world could be brought to accept their view of life and duty little would be left to be desired. When summoned to perform the marriage ceremony Dr. Williams no more comprehended the desperate opposition of Miss Lou to the will of her guardian, the shrinking, instinctive protest of her woman's nature, than he did the hostility of so many in the world to the tenets of his faith. His inability to understand the feelings, the mental attitude of others who did not unquestioningly accept his views and approve the action of the "powers that be" was perhaps the chief obstacle to his usefulness. He was not in the least degree intolerant or vindictive toward those who opposed him; his feeling rather was, "This is your opportunity. I gladly afford it and there my responsibility ceases"—a comfortable sort of belief to many, but one that would not satisfy a warm, earnest nature like Paul's, who said, "To the weak I became as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some." Paul would have found some way to reach the ear and heart of nearly every wounded man in the extemporized hospital, but for the

reasons suggested the visits of poor Dr. Williams soon began to be very generally dreaded. Old Uncle Lusthah had far better success with those who would listen to him.

Miss Lou soon found her way to the Federal wounded again. While agreeably to her wishes there was no formality in her reception, it was evident that the poor fellows had now learned to regard her with deep affection.

"I have told them all," said Dr. Borden who received her, "that you did as Yarry wished, that you took a good rest and were looking this morning as you should, and it has pleased them greatly. Phillips died last night, and has been removed. He hadn't any chance and did not suffer much. Remembering your wishes, we kept Yarry here. He lies there as if he were dozing after his pipe, as he wished you to think."

The girl stepped to the side of the dead soldier and for a moment or two looked silently into the still, peaceful face. Quietly and reverently the surgeon and others took off their hats and waited till she should speak. "Oh," she breathed softly at last, "how thoughtful and considerate you have been! You have made this brave, unselfish man look just as if he were quietly sleeping in his uniform. There is nothing terrible or painful in his aspect as he lies there on his side. Poor generous-hearted fellow! I believe he *is* at rest, as now he seems to be. I want you all to know," she added, looking round, "that he shall be buried where I can often visit his grave and keep it from neglect, for I can never forget the kindness that he—that you all have shown me. Dr. Borden, I will now show Uncle Lusthah the place where I wish the grave to be, and when all is ready I will come and follow poor Yarry to it. Do you think there ought to be a minister? There is one here now—Dr. Williams, who has a church near the Court House."

"Just as you wish, Miss Baron. For one, I think a prayer from Uncle Lusthah, as you call him, would do just as well and be more in accordance with Yarry's feelings if he could express them. The old negro has been in and out

nearly all night, waiting on the men, and has won their goodwill. He certainly is a good old soul."

"I agree with the doctor," added Captain Hanfield. "Were it my case I'd ask nothing better than a prayer from Uncle Lusthah over my grave, for he has acted like a good, patient old saint among us."

A murmur of approval from the others followed these words, and so it was arranged. Uncle Lusthah was soon found, and he followed the girl to the shadow of a great pine by the run and adjacent to the grassy plot with which the girl would ever associate Allan Scoville. It was there that she had looked into his eyes and discovered what her own heart was now teaching her to understand.

Aun' Jinkey followed them from her cabin and asked, "W'at you gwine ter do yere, honey?"

"Bury here a Norther soldier who has done me a very great honor."

"Oh, Miss Lou, I des feared ter hab 'im so neah de cabin."

"Hush!" said the girl, almost sternly. "Uncle Lusthah, you ought to teach mammy better than that."

"Ah, youn' mistis, hit's bred in de bone. I des mourns ober my people, 'fusin' ter be comf'ted. Yere Aun' Jinkey, gittin' gray lak me. She a 'fessor ob religion, ye de word 'spook' set her all a tremble. Ef dey is spooks, Aun' Jinkey, w'at dat ter you? Dere's tunder en lightnin' en yearthquakes en wurin' iliments en all kin' ob miseries ob de body. Who gwine ter keep all dem fum yo' cabin? Reck'n you betteah trus' de Lawd 'bout spooks too."

"You don't believe in any such foolishness, Uncle Lusthah?"

"Well, young mistis, I gettin' po'ful ole en I al'ays yeared on spooks sence I kin reckermember. I neber seed one fer sho, but I'se had strange 'sper'ences o' nights, en dar's dem w'at sez dey has seen de sperets ob de 'parted. I dunno. Dere's sump'n in folk's buzzums dat takes on quar sometimes, ez ef we libin' mighty close onter a worl'

we kyant mos' al'ays see. Dat ar doan trouble me nohow, en Aun' Jinkey orter know bettah. Ef de Lawd 'mits spooks, dat He business. He 'mits lots ob tings we kyant see troo. Look at dese yere old han's, young mistis. Dey's wuked nigh on eighty yeah, yit dey neber wuked fer mysef, dey neber wuked fer wife en chil'n. Dat mo' quar dan spooks."

"I don't know but you are right," said the girl thoughtfully. "I didn't know you felt so about being free. Aun' Jinkey never seemed to trouble much about it."

"I'se 'feared Aun' Jinkey tink a heap on de leeks en inions ob Egypt."

"Dar now, Uncle Lusthah, you po'ful good man, but you owns up you doan know nufin' 'bout spooks, en I knows you doan know nufin' 'bout freedom."

"Yes I does," replied Uncle Lusthah. "Ef de day come w'en I kin stan' up en say fer sho, 'I own mysef, en God ony my Mars'r,' I kin starbe ef dat He will. En dat 'minds me, young mistis. *Is* we free? Perkins growlin' roun' agin dis mawnin', en say we he'p 'bout de horspital ter-day, but we all go ter wuk ter-morrer. I 'lowed he orter talk ter us 'bout wages en he des larf en cuss me. W'at's gwine ter be de end? Marse Scoville en de big Linkum gin'ral say we free, en Perkins larf 'temptuous like. We des all a-lookin' ter you, young mistis."

"Oh, uncle! what can I do?"

"Shame on you, Uncle Lusthah, fer pilin' up sech a heap ob 'plexity on my honey," cried Aun' Jinkey, who was as practical as she was superstitious. "I kin tell you w'at ter do. I doan projeck en smoke in my chimbly-corner fer not'n. W'at kin you do but do ez you tole twel Marse Scoville en de Linkum gin'ral come agin? S'pose you say you woan wuk en woan 'bey, how you hole out agin Perkins en Mad Whately? Dey'd tar you all ter pieces. Dey say dis wah fer freedom. Whar yo' patience twel de wah'll end? De Yanks mus' do mo' dan say we free; dey mus' keep us free. Dar Aun' Suke. She say she free one minit en a

slabe nex' minute twel her haid mos' whirl off her shol'ers. Now she say, 'I doan know 'bout dis freedom business; I does know how ter cook en I'se gwinter cook twel dey gets troo a whirlin' back en forth.' You says I mus' trus' de Lawd 'bout spooks, Uncle Lusthah. W'y kyant you trus' de Lawd 'bout freedom?"

The old man shook his head sorrowfully, for Aun' Suke and Aun' Jinkey's philosophy didn't satisfy him. "I'se willin' ter do my shar," he said musingly, "de Lawd knows I be. Ef I cud die lak po' Marse Yarry en de oders fer freedom I'se willin' ter die."

"Now, Uncle Lusthah, your strong feeling and not your good sense speaks," said Miss Lou, who had been thinking earnestly, meanwhile recalling Scoville's prediction that the negroes might come to her for help and counsel. "Aun' Jinkey is certainly right in this case, and you must tell all our people from me that their only safe course now is to obey all orders and bide their time. Perkins' authority would be sustained by all the soldiers on the place and anything like disobedience would be punished severely. If what Lieutenant Scoville and the Northern general said is true you will soon be free without useless risks on your part. If that time comes I want you and mammy to stay with me. You shall be as free as I am and I'll give you wages."

"Dar now, young mistis, ef I know I free I bress de Lawd fer de charnce ter gib my wuk ter you. Dere's a po'ful dif'unce 'twix' bein' took en kep en des gibin' yosef out ob yo' own heart. Slav'y couldn't keep me fum gibin' mysef ter de Lawd en I been He free man many a long yeah, en I be yo' free man, too, fer lub."

"Look yere, now, honey," added Aun' Jinkey, wiping her eyes with her apron, "you kin bury sogers all 'bout de cabin ef you wanter. Uncle Lusthah kyant do mo' fer you, honey, ner me, tookin resks ob spooks. Des bury dem sogers, ef you wanter, right un'er my win'er."

CHAPTER XXVIII

TRUTH IF THE HEAVENS FALL

IT was quite natural that the thoughts of Perkins and Mr. Baron should turn toward the growing crops, neglected by reason of events unprecedented in their experience. The announcement to the slaves, first by Scoville and later confirmed by General Marston, of freedom, had staggered both employer and overseer, but every hour since the departure of the raiding Union column had been reassuring.

It is not within the province of this story to follow the fortunes of that force, since it is our modest purpose merely to dwell on those events closely related to the experiences of the Southern girl who has won our attention. She had suddenly become secondary in her uncle's thoughts. A phase of the war, like a sudden destructive storm, had been witnessed; like a storm, he hoped that it and its effects would pass away. The South was far from being subdued; the issue of the conflict unknown. He was the last man in the Confederacy to foresee and accept new conditions, especially when he still believed the Southern cause would triumph.

As the confusion of his mind, after the battle, passed he began to look around and consider what should be done, what could be saved out of what at first appeared a wreck. When Dr. Ackley assured him that the house and plantation would be rapidly abandoned as a hospital, hope and courage revived, while to these was added the spur of necessity.

He knew that he must "make his crops," or his fortunes

would be desperate. Remembering the value of timely labor in the spring season, he was eager on this second day after the battle to put his slaves to work again at their interrupted avocations. Accordingly he held a consultation with his nephew and Dr. Ackley.

"The hands are becoming demoralized," he said, "by unaccustomed duties and partial idleness. Some are sullen and others distracted by all kinds of absurd expectations. Uncle Lusthah, the leader and preacher among them, even had the impudence to ask Perkins about wages. The Yankee officers, when here, told them they were free, and they wish to act as if they were. The sooner that notion is taken out of their heads the better. This can be done now while my nephew is here to enforce authority, better than when we are alone again. It seems to me that a certain number could be detailed for regular hospital duty and the rest put to work as usual."

"I agree with you, certainly," replied Surgeon Ackley. "Give me a dozen men and half a dozen women to wash and cook, and I can get along. Lieutenant Whately, you, at your uncle's suggestion, can make the detail and enforce discipline among the rest."

"I was going to speak to you about this very matter, uncle," said Whately. "My overseer has been over and I find the black imps on our place are in much the same condition as yours, a few venturing to talk about wages or shares in the crop and all that nonsense. I sent him back with half a dozen men, armed to the teeth, and told him to put the hands at work as usual. Mother is going to ride over and spend part of the day. I don't wish her to be there alone just yet, and I shall gallop over in time to be on hand when she arrives. Things are getting settled, my arm is not so painful, and it is time we pulled ourselves and everything together. You struck the right note when you said, 'Now is the time to enforce authority.' It must be done sharply too, and these people taught the difference between the Yanks' incendiary talk and our rights and positive com-

mands. From what Perkins says, this old Uncle Lusthah is a fire-brand among your people. Give your overseer his orders and I'll see that he carries them out."

Perkins was summoned, acquainted with the policy—just to his mind—resolved upon, told to pick out the detail for hospital duty and to have the rest ready for work after an early dinner.

"Go right straight ahead, Perkins," added Whately, "and let me know if one of these Yankee-made freemen so much as growls."

Dr. Borden was not the kind of man to take upon himself undue responsibility. He had therefore mentioned to Surgeon Ackley Miss Baron's wish to give Yarry a special burial by the run and that she expected to be present.

Ackley good-naturedly acquiesced, saying, "I suppose there can be no objection to burying the man in a place of Miss Baron's selection, instead of the one designated by Mr. Baron. It's but a small concession to her who is so kindly bent on making herself useful. Let her have her own way in the whole affair."

The spirit of Yarry's turbulent career seemed destined to break out afresh over his final disposition. Uncle Lusthah went to the quarters in order to obtain the aid of two or three stout hands in digging the grave. It so happened that his visit took place during the adoption of Mr. Baron's policy in dealing with his property and just before Perkins received his instructions. The negroes not engaged in labor relating to the hospital gathered around Uncle Lusthah in the hope of receiving some advice from Miss Lou. Mournfully the old man told them what she and Aun' Jinkey had said, adding, "I doan see no oder way fer us des at dis time ob our triberlation. Ole Pharo sut'ny got he grip on us agin, he sut'ny hab fer a spell. But brudren en sistas, hit ony lak a cloud comin' 'cross de risin' sun. Let us des wait pashently de times en seasons ob de Lawd who alone kin brung de true 'liverance."

When he saw the deep, angry spirit of protest he threw

up his hands, crying, "W'at de use? I warn you; I 'treat you, be keerful. W'at could us do wid our bar han's agin armed men? I tells you we *mus'* wait or die lak Moses 'fo' we enter de promis lan'." Then he told them about Yarry and asked for two or three to volunteer to dig the grave.

A score stepped forward and nearly all expressed their purpose to attend the funeral. The old man persuaded all but three to remain near the quarters at present, saying, "So many gwine wid me mout mek trouble, fer Perkins look ugly dis mawnin'."

"We ugly too," muttered more than one voice, but they yielded to Uncle Lusthah's caution.

In going to the run Uncle Lusthah and his assistants had to pass somewhat near the house, and so were intercepted by Perkins and Whately, both eager to employ at once the tactics resolved upon.

"Where the devil are you goin' with those men and shovels?" shouted Perkins.

"We gwine ter dig a grabe fer a Linkum soger down by de run," replied Uncle Lusthah quietly.

"That ain't the place ter plant the Yanks, you old fool. Go back to the quarters. No words. Leftenant Whately will detail the hands fer sech work. Back with you. Why in —— don't you mind?"

"I hab my orders fum—"

"Silence!" thundered Whately. "Obey, or you'll go back at the point of the sabre."

Uncle Lusthah and his companions still hesitated, for they saw Miss Lou running toward them. She had lingered to talk with Aun' Jinkey and was returning when she heard Perkins' high, harsh words. The overseer was in a rage, and limped hastily forward with uplifted cane, when he was suddenly confronted by the hot face and flashing eyes of Miss Lou.

"Don't you dare strike Uncle Lusthah," she said sternly.

Her appearance and attitude evoked all the pent-up hate and passion in the man's nature and he shouted, "By the

'tarnal, I will strike 'im. I've got my orders en I'll find out yere en now whether a traitor girl or a Southern officer rules this place."

Before the blow could descend she sprang forward, seized his wrist and stayed his hand.

"Wretch! murderer! coward!" she cried.

"Oh, come, Cousin Lou, this won't do at all," began Whately, hastening up.

An ominous rush and trampling of feet was heard and an instant later the negroes were seen running toward them from the quarters and all points at which the sounds of the altercation reached them.

"Turn out the guard," shouted Whately. "Rally the men here with carbines and ball-cartridges." He whirled Perkins aside, saying, "Get out of the way, you fool." Then he drew his sabre and thundered to the negroes, "Back, for your lives!"

They hesitated and drew together. Miss Lou went directly toward them and implored, "Go back. Go back. Do what I ask and perhaps I can help you. If you don't, no one can or will help you. See, the soldiers are coming."

"We'll 'bey you, young mistis," said Uncle Lusthah, "but we uns lak ter hab 'splained des what we got ter 'spect. We kyant die but oncet, en ef we kyant eben bury de sogers dat die fer us—"

"Silence!" shouted Whately. "Forward here, my men. Form line! Advance! Shoot the first one that resists." He then dashed forward, sought to encircle his cousin with his arm and draw her out of the way.

She eluded him and turned swiftly toward the advancing line of men, crying, "Stop, if there is a drop of Southern blood in your veins." They halted and stared at her. She resumed, "You will have to walk over me before you touch these poor creatures. Uncle" (for Mr. Baron now stood aghast on the scene), "as you are a man, come here with me and speak, explain to your people. That is all they ask. They have been told that they were free, and now

the oldest and best among them, who was doing my bidding, almost suffered brutal violence from a man not fit to live. Where is the justice, right, or sense in such a course? Tell your people what you wish, what you expect, and that they will be treated kindly in obeying you."

She recognized that every moment gained gave time for cooler thoughts and better counsels, also for the restraining presence of others who were gathering upon the scene. It was in the nature of her headlong cousin to precipitate trouble without thought of the consequences; but as she spoke she saw Surgeons Ackley and Borden running forward. Captain Maynard was already at her side, and Whately looked as if he could cut his rival down with the weapon in his hand. While Mr. Baron hesitated Mrs. Whately also reached her niece and urged, "Brother, I adjure you, go and speak to your people. They *are* your people and you should tell them what to expect before you begin to punish. Go with Surgeon Ackley and settle this question once for all."

"Yes, Mr. Baron," said Ackley sternly, "we must settle this question promptly. Such uproar and excitement are bad for my patients and not to be permitted for an instant."

It was evident that the surgeon was terribly angry. He had been brought up in the old regular army, and anything like insubordination or injury to his patients were things he could not tolerate. Mr. Baron went forward with him and said in a low tone:

"You are virtually in command here and all know it. A few words from you will have more effect than anything I can say."

"Very well, then," responded the resolute surgeon, and he strode toward the negroes, not noticing that Miss Lou kept almost at his side.

"Look here, you people," he began harshly, "do you think I will permit such disturbances? They may be the death of brave men. Quit your nonsense at once. You are simply what you've always been. Yankee words don't

make you free any more than they make us throw down our arms. What happened to the general who said you were free? We fought him and drove him away. There is only one thing you can do and *must* do—go to work as before, and woe be to those who make trouble. That's all."

"No," cried Miss Lou, "that surely cannot be all."

"Miss Baron! What can you mean?"

"I mean that these poor creatures are looking to me, trusting in me, and I have promised to intercede in their behalf. Tell them at least this, you or uncle, that if they obey and work quietly and faithfully they shall not be treated harshly, nor subjected to the brutal spite of that overseer, Perkins."

"Truly, Miss Baron, you can scarcely expect me to interfere with your uncle's management of his property. The only thing I can and *will* do is to insist on absolute quiet and order on the place. In this case every one must obey the surgeon-in-charge. Do you understand that?" he concluded, turning to the negroes. "Neither you nor any one else can do anything to injure my patients. As you value your lives, keep quiet. I will not permit even a harsh, disturbing sound. Do not dare to presume on Miss Baron's kindness, mistaken in this crisis. This unruly, reckless spirit must be stamped out now. Your owner and master will tell you what he expects, and I will have the first man who disobeys *shot*. Miss Baron, you must come with me."

"Yes, sir, but not until I have spoken the truth about this affair. All your power, Dr. Ackley, cannot keep me dumb when I see such injustice. You are threatening and condemning without having heard a word of explanation. Uncle Lusthah and those with him were simply doing my bidding. Can you think I would stand by and see him cursed and beaten? These people have not shown any unruly, reckless spirit. They may well be bewildered, and they only asked what they must expect. God is my witness,

I will cry out 'Shame!' with my last breath if they are treated brutally. They will be quiet, they will do their duty if treated kindly. They shall not appeal to me for justice and mercy in vain. My words may not help them, but I shall not stand tamely by like a coward, but will call any man on earth coward who butchers one of these unarmed negroes."

She stood before them all possessed by one thought—justice. Her face was very pale, but stern, undaunted and noble in its expression. She was enabled to take her course from the courage, simplicity and unconventionality of her nature, becoming utterly absorbed by her impulse to defend those who looked to her, neither regarding nor fearing, in her strong excitement, the consequences to herself.

Dr. Borden was hastening forward to remind Ackley of his promise concerning Yarry's grave, and to show the girl that he at least would stand with her; but his chief waved him back. The old surgeon of the regular army could appreciate courage, and the girl's words and aspect pierced the thick crust of his military and professional armor, touching to the quick the man within him. He saw in the brave young face defiance of him, of the whole world, in her sense of right, and he had the innate nobility of soul to respect her motive and acknowledge the justice of her action. Watching her attentively until she was through speaking he took off his hat, stepped forward and gave her his hand.

"You are a brave girl," he said frankly. "You are doing what you think is right and I am proud of you. Tell these people yourself to go back to their quarters, behave themselves and obey their rightful master. After your words in their behalf any one who does not obey deserves to be shot."

She was disarmed and subdued at once. "Ah, doctor," she faltered, tears in her eyes, "now you've conquered me." Then turning toward the negroes she cried, "Do just as Dr. Ackley has said Go quietly to work and be patient.

Uncle Lusthah, you know I told you to do so before all this happened. I tell you so again and shall expect you to use all your influence to keep perfect order."

"We 'bey you, young mistis; we tank you fer speakin' up fer us," and the old man led the way toward the quarters, followed by all his flock.

Dr. Ackley gave his arm to the girl and led her to the house. Captain Maynard took off his hat in a very deferential manner as she passed; she walked on unheeding the salutation. Whately frowned at him and dropped his hand on the hilt of his sabre. At this pantomime Maynard smiled contemptuously as he walked away. In a few moments the scene was as quiet and deserted as it had been crowded and threatening.

On the way to the house Miss Lou explained more fully the circumstances relating to the dead soldier, Yarry, and Ackley said good-naturedly, "I'll have Uncle Lusthah and two others detailed to dig the grave and you can carry out your intentions; but, Miss Baron, you must be careful in the future how you let your inexperience and enthusiasm involve you in conflict with all recognized authority. We are safely out of this scrape; I can't answer for anything more."

"Believe me," she said earnestly, "I don't wish to make trouble of any kind, and after your course toward me, I will seek to carry out your orders in every way. If I dared I would ask one favor. Uncle Lusthah is too old to work in the field and he is a kind, good old man. If you would have him detailed to wait on the wounded—"

"Yes, yes, I will. You are a brave, good-hearted girl and mean well. I shall rely on your promise to work cordially with me hereafter. Now go to your room and get calm and rested. You are trembling like a frightened bird. I'll see your uncle, cousin and Dr. Borden. You shall bury your chivalrous Yank just as you wish. Then all must go according to regulations."

She smiled as she gave him her hand, saying, "You may

put me under arrest if I don't mind you in everything hereafter."

"Well," muttered the surgeon, as he looked after her, "to think that a girl should have a probe long and sharp enough to go straight to the heart of a man of my age! No wonder Maynard and Whately are over head and ears."

CHAPTER XXIX

"ANGEL OF DEATH"

IT would seem as if the brief tempest of the morning had cleared the air. Two strong natures had asserted themselves. Surgeon Ackley's recognition of Miss Lou's spirit and the justice of her plea turned out to be as politic as it was sincere and unpremeditated. The slaves learned all they could hope from her or any one now in authority and were compelled to see the necessity of submission. Whately was taught another lesson concerning the beauties of headlong action, while even his egotism was not proof against the feeling that his cousin's straightforward fearlessness would baffle all measures opposed to her sense of right. As for Perkins, he began to fear as well as hate her, seeing her triumph again. The only reward of his zeal had been Whately's words, "Get out of the way, you fool." Thereafter, with the exception of the girl's scathing words, he had been ignored. He had been made to feel that Ackley's threats had a meaning for him as well as for the negroes, and that if he needlessly provoked trouble again he would be confronted with the stern old army surgeon. Having known Whately from a boy he stood in little fear of him, but was convinced that he could not trifle with Ackley's patience an instant. He now recognized his danger. In his rage he had forgotten the wide difference in rank between the girl he would injure and himself. The courtesy promptly shown to her by Maynard and especially by the surgeon-in-chief taught him that one whom he had scarcely noticed as she grew up a repressed, brooding child and girl, possessed by birth the consideration ever shown to a Southern lady.

He knew what that meant, even if he could not appreciate her conduct. Maynard had scowled upon him; Mrs. Whately bestowed merely a glance of cold contempt, while her son had failed him utterly as an ally. He therefore sullenly drove his malice back into his heart with the feeling that he must now bide his time.

Even Mr. Baron was curt and said briefly before he left the ground, "Be sure you're right before you go ahead. Hereafter give your orders quietly and let me know who disobeys."

The old planter was at his wit's end about his niece, but even he was compelled to see that his former methods with her would not answer. New ideas were being forced upon him as if by surgical operations. Chief among them was the truth that she could no longer be managed or restrained by fear or mere authority on the part of any one. He would look at her in a sort of speechless wonder and ask himself if she were the child to whom he had supposed himself infallible so many years. His wife kept on the even tenor of her way more unswervingly than any one on the place. She was as incapable of Dr. Ackley's fine sentiment as she was of her nephew's ungovernable passion. She neither hoped nor tried to comprehend the "perversity" of her niece, yet, in the perplexed conditions of the time, she filled a most important and useful niche. Since the wounded men were to be fed, she became an admirable commissary general, preventing waste and exacting good wholesome cookery on the part of Aun' Suke and her assistants.

Poor Yarry was buried quietly at last, Miss Lou, with Dr. Borden, Captain Hanfield and two or three of his comrades standing reverently by the grave while Uncle Lusthah offered his simple prayer. Then the girl threw upon the mound some flowers she had gathered and returned to her duties as nurse. The remains of the old Confederate colonel were sent to his family, with the letter which Miss Lou had written for him. Every day the numbers in the hospital

diminished, either by death or by removal of the stronger patients to the distant railroad town. Those sent away in ambulances and other vehicles impressed into the service were looked after by Surgeon Ackley with official thoroughness and phlegm; in much the same spirit and manner Dr. Williams presided over the departure of others to the bourne from which none return, then buried them with all proper observance. Uncle Lusthah carried around by a sort of stealth his pearl of simple, vital, hope-inspiring faith, and he found more than one ready to give their all for it. The old man pointed directly to Him who "taketh away the sin of the world," then stood aside that dying eyes might look. With the best intentions Dr. Williams, with his religious formulas, got directly in the way, bewildering weak minds with a creed.

Mrs. Whately and her son went and came from their plantation and were troubled over the condition of things there. The slaves were in a state of sullen, smouldering rebellion and several of them had disappeared. "I fear Madison has been too arbitrary," she admitted to her brother.

Mr. Baron shrugged his shoulders and smoked in silence. Perhaps his preposterous niece had not been so crazy after all.

Between Maynard and Whately there were increasing evidences of trouble, which the mother of the latter did her best to avert by remonstrances and entreaty. On one occasion Whately had said a little irritably, "I say, Dr. Ackley, what's the use of Maynard's hanging around here? He is almost well enough for duty."

"It is chiefly out of consideration for you that I am keeping him," replied the surgeon gravely, in well-concealed mischief. "It is clear that he has entered the lists with you for your cousin's hand, and I could not further his suit better than by sending him away, especially if it were suspected that I did so at your instigation. He is doing well here, good-naturedly helps me in my writing and can

soon go direct to his regiment. It seems to me that your cousin holds a pretty even balance between you, and all a man should want is a fair field."

Whately walked frowningly away, more than ever convinced that the surgeon was too good a friend of his rival to interfere.

At the close of the fourth day after the battle there was an arrival at The Oaks that greatly interested Miss Lou—a stately, white-haired old lady, the mother of Lieutenant Waldo. She was very pale and it would have been hard for Surgeon Ackley to meet her agonized look, her shrinking as if from a blow, were he unable to hold out any hope.

"Mrs. Waldo," he said gravely, "your son is living and there's a chance of his getting well. His cheerfulness and absolute quiet of mind may save him. If he had fretted or desponded he would have died before this."

"Yes," replied his mother with a great sigh of relief, "I know."

"Miss Baron, will you kindly prepare Waldo for his mother's visit? Meanwhile, I will tell her a little about his case and our management of it. He doesn't know that I sent for you, for I was not sure you could come."

"Is this Miss Baron and one of my son's nurses?"

"Yes, and doing more for him than I—giving him all the bovine nectar and honeyed words he can take."

"God bless you, my dear. Please let me kiss you."

When Miss Lou entered Waldo's tent he whispered with a laugh, "It's four hours since you were here."

"No, scarcely two."

"Well, I'm as hungry as if it were four hours."

"That's fine. You're getting right well. Will you be very good and quiet—not a bit excited, if I let some one else bring you your supper?"

She beamed upon him so joyously that he exclaimed aloud, with a rush of tears, "Ah! mother?"

The girl nodded and said, "Now remember, don't break her heart by being worse."

"Oh, how sweet and lovely of her! I'll get well now, sure."

"That's a nice way to treat your old nurse."

Smilingly he held out his hand and said, "You are almost as pretty and good as she is, but you aren't mother." Then he added in strong sympathy, "Forgive me. You haven't any, have you? You don't know about this mother love."

"I know enough about it to have the heartache for its lack. Now you must save your strength till she comes. Good-by."

From that hour he steadily gained, banishing the look of anxiety from his mother's face. Mrs. Whately sighed as she saw how her niece's heart warmed toward the stranger, and how strong an attachment was growing between them. "Louise is drifting away from us all," she thought, "yet I cannot see that she encourages Captain Maynard."

A genuine friendship had also grown between the girl and Captain Hanfield, the Federal officer, and she was heartily sorry when he told her that he would be sent to the railroad town the next day. "My wound isn't doing well and I seem to be running down," he explained. "Dr. Borden has been able to keep me thus far, but I must go to-morrow. Perhaps it's best. He is trying to get me paroled. If I could only get home to my wife and children I'd rally fast enough. I'm all run down and this climate is enervating to me."

She tried to hearten him by kind, hopeful words, and he listened to her with a wistful look on his handsome face. "How I'd like you to meet my little girl!" he said. "Won't I make her blue eyes open when I tell her about you!"

Another bond of union between them was the captain's acquaintance with Scoville, and he soon observed that she listened very patiently and attentively when he spoke of the brave scout's exploits. "I declare," he had said, laughing, "I keep forgetting that you are a Southern girl and that

you may not enjoy hearing of the successes of so active an enemy."

"Lieutenant Scoville is not a personal enemy," she had replied guardedly. "He showed us all very great kindness, me especially. I wish that both you and he were on our side."

"Well, as you say down here, I reckon we are on *your* side any way," had been the captain's smiling reply.

She spoke to Surgeon Ackley promptly about the prospects of a parole, but he said, "Impossible, Miss Baron. The question would at once arise, 'If granted to Hanfield, why not to others?' I reckon Borden has been trying to rally his friend by hopes even when knowing them baseless."

This proved to be the case, and the following day brought the young girl a strange and very sad experience. Dr. Borden appeared at breakfast looking troubled and perplexed. Miss Lou immediately inquired about the captain. The doctor shook his head saying, "He isn't so well. I'd like to speak with you by and by."

She was so depressed by the surgeon's aspect that she paid little heed to the conversation of her two admirers and soon left the table. Borden followed her, and when they were alone began sadly, "Miss Baron, perhaps I am going to ask of you far too much, but you have shown yourself to be an unusually brave girl as well as a kind-hearted one. Hanfield is an old friend of mine and perhaps I've done wrong to mislead him. But I didn't and couldn't foresee what has happened, and I did hope to start him in genuine convalescence, feeling sure that if he got well he would give up the hope of going home as a matter of course. So far from succeeding, a fatal disease has set in—tetanus, lockjaw. He's dying and doesn't know it. I can't tell him. I've made the truth doubly cruel, for I've raised false hopes. He continually talks of home and his pleading eyes stab me. You can soften the blow to him, soothe and sustain him in meeting what is sure to come."

"Oh, is there no hope?"

"None at all. He can't live. If you feel that the ordeal would be too painful—I wouldn't ask it if I hadn't seen in you unexpected qualities."

"Oh, I must help him bear it; yet how can I? how shall I?"

"Well, I guess your heart and sympathy will guide you. I can't. I can only say you had better tell him the whole truth. He ought to know it for his own and family's sake now, while perfectly rational. Soften the truth as you can, but you can't injure him by telling it plainly, for he will die. God knows, were it my case, the tidings wouldn't seem so very terrible if told by a girl like you."

"Oh, but the tidings are so terrible to speak, especially to such a man. Think of his beautiful wife and daughter, of his never seeing them again. Oh, it's just awful," and her face grew white at the prospect.

"Yes, Miss Baron, it is. In the midst of all the blood and carnage of the war, every now and then a case comes up which makes even my calloused heart admit, 'It's just awful.' I'm only seeking to make it less awful to my poor friend, and perhaps at too great cost to you."

"Well, he on his side, and others on ours, didn't count the cost; neither must I. I must not think about it or my heart will fail me. I will go at once."

"Come then, and God help you and him."

A straw-bed had been made up in a large, airy box-stall where the captain could be by himself. Uncle Lusthah was in attendance and he had just brought a bowl of milk.

Borden had left Miss Lou to enter alone. The captain held out his hand and said cheerfully, "Well, it's an ill wind that blows nowhere. This one will blow me home all the sooner I trust, for it must be plainer now than ever that I need the home change which will put me on my feet again. You needn't look so serious. I feel only a little more poorly than I did—sore throat and a queer kind of stiffness in my jaws as if I had taken cold in them."

"Do I look very serious?" she faltered.

"Yes, you look as if troubled about something. But there, see what an egotistic fellow I am! As if you hadn't troubles of your own! pretty deep ones, too, I fear. Our coming here has given you a wonderful experience, Miss Baron. No matter; you've met it like a soldier and will have much to remember in after years. You can never become a commonplace woman now and there are such a lot of 'em in the world. When I remember all you have done for us it makes me ill to think of some in our town—giggling, silly little flirts, with no higher ambition than to strut down the street in a new dress."

"Oh, don't think of them or over-praise me. Perhaps if they had been here and compelled to face things they would have done better than I. A short time ago I didn't dream of these experiences, and then I would have said I couldn't possibly endure them."

"Well, you have," resumed the captain, who was slightly feverish, excited and inclined to talk. "One of my dearest hopes now is to get back to my little girl soon and deepen her mind by making her ashamed of the silly things in a girl's life. Of course I wish her to be joyous and happy as a young thing should be, as I think you would be if you had the chance. By means of your story I can make her ashamed ever to indulge in those picayune, contemptible feminine traits which exasperate men. I want her to be brave, helpful, sincere, like you, like her mother. How quickly poor Yarry recognized the spirit in which you came among us at first! Jove! I didn't think him capable of such feeling. I tell you, Miss Baron, the roughest of us reverence an unselfish woman—one who doesn't think of herself first and always. She mayn't be a saint, but if she has heart enough for sympathy and is brave and simple enough to bestow it just as a cool spring gushes from the ground, we feel she is the woman God meant her to be. Ah, uncle, that reminds me—another cup of that cold water. For some reason I'm awfully thirsty this morning."

Miss Lou listened with hands nervously clasping and

unclasping, utterly at a loss to know how to tell the man, dreaming of home and planning for the future, that he must soon sleep beside poor Yarry. She had already taken to herself the mournful comfort that his grave also should be where she could care for it and keep it green.

"I wish to tell you more about my little Sadie and my wife. Some day, when this miserable war is over, you will visit us. We'll give you a reception then which may turn even your head. Ha! ha! you thought we'd be worse than Indians. Well, I'll show you a lot of our squaws in full evening dress and you'll own that my wife is the prettiest in the tribe. Every day, until we started on this blasted raid, I received a letter from her. I knew about as well what was going on at home as if there. With my wife it was love almost at first sight, but I can tell you that it's not 'out of sight out of mind' with us. Time merely adds to the pure, bright flame, and such a pair of lovers as we shall be when gray as badgers will be worth a journey to you."

Miss Lou could maintain her self-control no longer. She burst into tears and sobbed helplessly.

"You poor little girl," exclaimed the captain in deep commiseration. "Here I've been talking like a garrulous fool when your heart is burdened with some trouble that perhaps you would like to speak to me about. Tell me, my child, just as little Sadie would."

"My heart *is* burdened with trouble, captain; it feels as if it would break when I hear you talk so. Would to God little Sadie were here, and your beautiful wife too! Oh, what shall I say? How can I, how can I?"

"Miss Baron!" he exclaimed, looking at her in vague alarm.

"Oh, Captain Hanfield, you are a brave, unselfish man like Yarry. Don't make it too hard for me. Oh, I feel as if I could scarcely breathe."

As he saw her almost panting at his side and tears streaming from her eyes, the truth began to dawn upon

him. He looked at her steadily and silently for a moment, then reached out his hand as he said in an awed whisper, "Is it on account of me ? Did Borden send you here?"

She took his hand, bowed her forehead upon it and wept speechlessly.

She felt it tremble for a moment, then it was withdrawn and placed on her bowed head. "So you are the angel of death to me?" the officer faltered.

Her tears were her only, yet sufficient answer. Both were silent, she not having the heart to look at him.

At last he said in deep tones, "I wasn't expecting this. It will make a great change in"—and then he was silent again.

She took his limp hand and bowed her forehead on it, as before feeling by some fine instinct that her unspoken sympathy was best.

It was. The brave man, in this last emergency, did as he would have done in the field at the head of his company if subjected to a sudden attack. He promptly rearranged and marshalled all his faculties to face the enemy. There was not a moment of despairing, vain retreat. In the strong pressure upon his mind of those questions which must now be settled once for all, he forgot the girl by his side. He was still so long that she timidly raised her head and was awed by his stern, fixed expression of deep abstraction. She did not disturb him except as the stifled sobs of her deep, yet now passing agitation convulsed her bosom, and she began to give her attention to Uncle Lusthah, hitherto unheeded. The old man was on his knees in a dusky corner, praying in low tones. "Oh, I'm so glad he's here," she thought. "I'm glad he's praying God to help us both." In the uncalculating sympathy and strength of her nature she had unconsciously entered into the dying man's experience and was suffering with him. Indeed, her heart sank with a deeper dread and awe than he from the great change which he had faced so often as to be familiar with its thought.

At last he seemed to waken to her presence and said compassionately, "Poor little girl! so all your grief was about me. How pale you are!"

"I do so wish you could go home," she breathed; "I am so very, *very* sorry."

"Well, Miss Baron," he replied with dignity, "I'm no better than thousands of others. I always knew this might happen any day. You have learned why it is peculiarly hard for me—but that's not to be thought of now. If I've got my marching orders, that's enough for a soldier. It was scarcely right in Borden to give you this heavy task. I could have faced the truth from his lips."

"He felt so dreadfully about it," she replied. "He said he had been giving you false hopes in trying to make you get well."

"Oh, yes, he meant kindly. Well, if it hasn't been too much for you, I'm glad you told me. Your sympathy, your face, will be a sweet memory to carry, God only knows where. Since it can't be little Sadie's face or my wife's I'm glad it's yours. What am I saying? as if I should forget their dear faces through all eternity."

"Ah! captain, I wish you could hear one of our soldiers, talk. Dying with him just means going to Heaven."

The officer shook his head. I'm not a Christian," he said simply.

"Neither am I," she replied, "but I've been made to feel that being one is very different from what I once thought it was."

"Well, Miss Baron, what is it to be a Christian—what is your idea of it? There has always seemed to me such a lot of conflictinng things to be considered—well, well, I haven't given the subject thought and it's too late now. I must give my mind to my family and—"

Uncle Lusthah stepped before him with clasped hands and quivering lips. "Ef marse cap'n des list'n ter de ole man a minit. I ain't gwine ter talk big en long. I kyant. I des wanter say I hab 'spearance. Dat sump'n, marse

cap'n, you kyant say not'n agin—rale 'spearance, sump'n I *knows.*"

"Well, you kind old soul, what do you know?"

"P'raps des what mars'r knows ef he ony tinks a lil. Let us git right down ter de root ob de marter, kaze I feared dere ain' time fer 'locutions."

"Now you're right at least, uncle. I must set my house in order. I must write to my wife."

"Marse cap'n, you gwine on a journey. Wa't yo' wife wish mo'n dat you git ready fer de journey? She tek dat journey too, bime by soon, en you bof be at de same deah home."

"Ah, uncle, if that could be true, the sting of death would be gone."

"Sut'ny, marse cap'n. Didn't I know dat ar w'en I mek bole ter speak? Now des tink on hit, mars'r. Yere I is, an ole ign'rant slabe, kyant eben read de good Book. De worl' full ob poor folks lak me. Does you tink ef de Lawd mean ter sabe us 't all He'd do hit in some long rounerbout way dat de wise people kyant mos' fin' out? No, bress He gret big heart, He des stan' up en say to all, 'Come ter me en I gib you res'."

"Yes, uncle, but I haven't gone to Him. I don't know how to go, and what's more, I don't feel it's right to go now at the last minute as if driven by fear."

"Now, cap'n, fergib de ole man fer sayin' you all wrong. Haint young mistis been breakin' her lil gyurlish heart ober yo' trouble? Am de Lawd dat die fer us wuss'n a graven himage? Doan He feel fer you mo'n we kin? I reck'n you got des de bes' kin' of prep'ration ter go ter 'Im. You got trouble. How He act toward folks dat hab trouble—ev'y kin' ob trouble? Marse cap'n, I des *knows* dat de Lawd wanter brung you en yo' wife en dat lil Sadie I year you talk 'bout all togeder whar He is. I des *knows* hit. Hit's 'spearance."

"Miss Baron," said the captain calmly, "Isn't it wonderful? This old slave says he knows what, if true, is worth

more to me than all the accumulated wisdom of the world. What do you think of it?"

"It seems as if it ought to be true," she answered earnestly. "I never so felt before that it *ought* to be true. We never should have been born, or given such love as you have for your dear ones, if it isn't true. Oh, to be just snatched hopelessly away from such ties is horrible. My whole soul revolts at it."

"See here, uncle," said the captain almost sternly, "I'm not going to groan, sigh, weep, and take on in any of your camp-meeting tactics. I am before the last great enemy and I know how to meet him like a man and soldier, if not a Christian. I'm willing to do anything not insincere or unmanly to meet my wife and children again. If my thought and feeling for them at this time isn't right, then I've been created wrong."

"Marse cap'n, I'se seen de mos' po'ful feelin's en miseries ob de 'victed ones vaperate lak de maunin' dew en I'se larn in my ole age dat de sabin po'r ain' in we uns, ner in anyting we is ob oursefs ner in w'at we po' lil chil'n of yearth kin do. De Lawd say, He come ter seek en sabe de loss; I wuz loss. De wuss ting He enemies cud speak agin 'Im wuz, Dis man 'ceiveth sinners: I wuz a sinner. I des arst 'Im ter sabe me, en He did. I des trus' 'Im fer life en death en does de bes' I kin. Dat's all. But hit's '*spearance*, marse cap'n, en I *knows* hit. Now, marse cap'n, w'at fo' you go way in the de dark, you dunno whar? De bressed Lawd say, I go ter prepare a place fer you. Now you des let young mistis write ter yo' folks dat you gwine wid Jesus ter dat ar place en dat you gwine ter wait fer dem dar en welcome um home bime by des lak dey wud welcome you home way up Norf. Dat ud comf't em a heap, en hit's all true. I knows hit. Young mistis berry sens'ble w'en she say we neber orter be bawn ef hit ain' true."

The officer looked fixedly at the tearful, wrinkled face for a few moments and then said firmly, "I'll soon find out if it's true. If I do this thing at all, I'll do it in the only

way I can. Miss Baron, you may write to my wife that I accept her faith. It's much the same as Uncle Lusthah's—too simple and unphilosophical, I used to think; but it meets my need now. I can't deal even with God in any other way than this. The mind he has endowed me with revolts at anything else as hypocritical. I can and do say that I will accept in grateful, downright sincerity the terms which Uncle Lusthah accepted, which my wife accepted. I submit myself to His will. I do this calmly, as I would give my hand and pledge my faith to a man, and I cannot do any more. Now He may do with me as He pleases. Miss Baron, you do the same and you'll be just as good—yes, a much better Christian than I, for I've done rough, bad things in my life. Don't you wait till you're in my extremity. I must say that I have a wretched sense of self-contempt that I am looking Heavenward with dying eyes. There's only one thing that reconciles me to it—the words 'Our Father.' God knows that I'd open my arms to my little Sadie under any possible circumstances. What the old man here says must be true, for to trifle with or mock a man in my position presupposes a degree of malignity inconceivable. I ask nothing better than that Christ will receive me as I would receive my child from world-wide wandering."

"Ah, bress He big gret heart," cried Uncle Lusthah, dropping on his knees, "w'en yo' fader en yo' moder for-sook you den de Lawd took you up."

"Miss Baron, I wish to think a while and learn from Borden just how much time I have left. You will come to me again?"

"Yes, whenever you wish."

"Well, then, good-by for a short time. Thank God for sending me such an angel of death. You stay with me, uncle, till I send you for Borden."

CHAPTER XXX

GLIMPSES OF MOODS AND MINDS

DR. BORDEN'S predictions were verified in regard to his friend and patient, Captain Hanfield, but not before the officer had dictated calm, farewell letters to his wife and "little Sadie." To Miss Lou were left the serene, smiling likenesses, a grave to be cared for beside Yarry's, and a memory that could never be blotted out. She was kept from witnessing the terrible convulsions which began soon after her interview, but was present at his death and held his hand until it was cold and lifeless.

Within two weeks after the battle very few patients were left, and all these were to go with Dr. Ackley on the following day, Lieutenant Waldo excepted. He was still too weak to be moved. His mother had become so skilful in the care of his wound that she would be competent, with the help of an aged resident practitioner, to carry him through his convalescence. Mrs. Whately now spent most of the time on her plantation, her presence being needed there to remedy the effects, as far as possible, of the harsh measures at first adopted by her son. It was discouraging effort. The strong ebb tide in the old order of things had set in even far from the Union lines, and only the difficulty in reaching them prevented a general stampede of the negroes. As it was, two or three of her best hands would steal away from time to time, and run the gantlet of many dangers in their travel by night Northward. Her attempts to mollify and render her slaves contented were more than counterbalanced by

the threats and severity of her son, who was too vacillating to adopt a fixed policy, and arbitrary by nature.

Her chief hope for him still centred in Miss Lou, upon whom his thoughts were fixed with a steadfastness and earnestness which his mother fondly believed would win her eventually. "I'm sure," she reasoned, "Captain Maynard has made no deep impression. He is about to depart. All will soon be gone, and the old monotony of plantation life will be resumed. After what has happened Louise will not be able to endure this. Madison will return, older and wiser from experience and she, with nothing else to occupy her thoughts will react, like all impulsive natures, from her opposition. Next to winning her or her favor from the start, he has scored a success in waking a hostility far removed from fatal indifference."

She maintained an affectionate manner toward her niece and never discussed the hope she entertained and expectation of calling her daughter. In truth, she had won the girl's respect and goodwill in a very high degree. She had been a kind and successful nurse among the wounded, confining her efforts chiefly to the Confederates. She had also been a dignified lady in all the scenes they had passed through. Her weakness was her son, yet the girl was compelled to admit that it was the weakness of love. In seeking to bring about the detested union a motherly heart and feeling toward her had ever been apparent.

The girl was already becoming depressed by a presentiment of the dull, stagnant days to come. Scoville had been lost in the great outside, unknown world completely. She was suffering from reaction after the strong excitements and fatigues of her experience. Her two lovers, remaining on the scene, possessed a sort of goading interest which compelled her to think of them, but she contemplated their near departure without regret. Nothing in her nature answered to their looks, words and evident desires. She felt that she would as soon marry one as the other, and that she would rather be buried beside Captain Hanfield and take the jour-

ney of which Uncle Lusthah had quaintly spoken than wed either. Yet in her lassitude she feared that she could now be compelled to marry either or any one if enough active force was employed, so strangely had ebbed her old fearless spirit.

It were with a kind of wondering pity that she looked at Maynard and saw the evidences of an honest, ardent attachment. "Why does he feel so?" she asked herself. "I have done nothing for him, given no encouragement, and would not care if I never saw him again. I merely wish him well, as I do so many others. Why can't he see this, and just act on the truth? He says he is coming to see me every chance he gets and tries to make me feel that he'll never give me up. Perhaps if I should let him speak plainly he would see how useless it all would be."

Circumstances apparently favored the half-formed purpose. Languid from the heat of the day, she went out on the piazza after supper, sat down on the upper step and leaned against a rose-entwined pillar. Maynard was entranced by the picture she made and promptly availed himself of the opportunity. Every one else had disappeared except Zany, of whom glimpses could be caught through the open windows of the supper-room; but she did not count. Sitting on a lower step so as to be in a measure at her feet Maynard began.

"Miss Baron, I am thinking very sadly, if you are not, over the fact that I am to go away in the morning."

"Yes," she replied, half-consciously ignoring his personal view, "the old house and plantation will soon be as quiet and deserted as before."

"Do you regret this?"

"I scarcely know. I am very tired and feel sad over all that has happened. Perhaps I'll feel differently by and by, when I've rested and had time to think."

"Oh, Miss Baron, if you knew how earnestly I hope to be remembered in those thoughts, to give you something definite to think of."

She had scarcely the energy to check him, the thought occurring more than once, "I might just as well let him speak his mind and see how vain his hope is."

"You have not given me encouragement," he resumed. "You have seemed too preoccupied, sad or weary; but this phase of your life will pass away. Our glorious cause must soon be crowned with success. If I survive, may I not hope that when I come again you will give me a hearing, a chance? I can be patient, even though not patient by nature. I will do all that a man—"

"Captain," interrupted the girl, at last, "I suppose, from the books I've read, I should make some fine speeches about the honor you are bestowing on me, and all that. I'm too tired and sad for anything conventional and appropriate. I'm just going to answer you like a simple, honest girl. One of my chief reasons for sadness is that you feel as you do. I see no reason for it. I'm glad you say I've given you no encouragement, I know I have not. Why should you care so for me when I do not and cannot respond at all? I do sincerely wish you well, but it seems to me that it should be enough for a man when a girl listens to such words as yours in weary sadness only."

"It may be hard indeed for a man to recognize this truth, Miss Baron, but I am not speaking of the present—of the future rather. There has been much to make you sad and weary. Your very youth and high spirit will soon lead you to react from your present depression. Let me speak of the future. Please let me fill that with hope for you and for me."

"Oh, I don't know about the future. For some reason I dread even to think of it."

At this instant Whately galloped to the piazza, threw the reins on the neck of his horse as he dismounted, evidently not caring in his perturbation where the animal wandered. He was in a bad mood, for things were not going smoothly at home. The attitude of his rival at his cousin's feet stung him into a jealous rage and he remarked bitterly

as he strode past them, "Don't let my inopportune arrival disturb this charming tête-à-tête. In fact, I had no business to remain at my uncle's home at all, even at the call of duty, after Captain Maynard signified his intention of making it the long-continued field of his operations."

Cut to the quick, Maynard sprang to his feet, but Miss Lou merely made a gesture of annoyance and went to her room.

"Lieutenant Whately," began the captain in low, stern tones, "were I not in some sense a guest, even though an unwelcome one—"

"You are no guest of mine, sir, nor indeed of any one that I am aware of."

"Thank you. I *was* haunted by some restraining consideration of Southern hospitality, but if I am free—"

"You are perfectly free, sir," again interrupted Whately, dropping his hand on the hilt of his sabre. "Let me also add that a Southern gentleman would not have made Southern hospitality a subterfuge for an opportunity to press a suit repugnant to the family concerned. We have never failed in hospitality to any invited guest."

"Your words are offensive, sir."

"I mean them to be so."

"Very well; then I have but one answer. I challenge you. Choose your weapons, hour and place of meeting."

"Revolvers, if you please. Meet me back of the grove yonder, at the right of the house, at daybreak."

"I'll not fail you. There is no need of seconds in this affair, I take it, and we are to keep our purpose secret. Dr. Ackley would interfere and the family be distressed were our intentions known."

"No one need know till our shots are heard and then it will be too late to interfere. I insist that we fight to the death."

"Certainly, if that's your wish. Good-evening, sir."

"Good-evening," and Whately went to his room to re-

move the dust of his ride and prepare for the late supper which his aunt had ordered for him.

This lady, hearing his step in the hall, hastened downstairs and called for Zany. "Yassum," came in quick response. The young woman emerged from the dining-room looking as stolid as a wooden image.

"Attend to Lieutenant Whately's supper and see that he has the best you can get for him."

"Yassum."

Mrs. Baron then repaired to her husband's office, where he and Surgeon Ackley were closeted, making up the accounts relating to the occupation of the property for hospital purposes. Maynard lighted his pipe, and strolled out into the grounds. He was in a cold, deadly mood of anger. There was just enough sting of truth in Whately's words to make the insult unendurable. Added to this was intense exasperation that he had been interrupted at a critical and, as he believed, a hopeful, moment. He had seen that the girl was not ready for his suit or that of any one at present, but was quite sure he could have won permission to renew his addresses in the future. Now—well, he was ready enough to fight to the death and utterly oblivious of the still, serene beauty of the night. He appeared but a shadow as he walked quietly under the trees, but it was a shadow of death. An hour since and he was but a passionate youth, full of ardent love and longing, vaguely inspired, under the influence of his passion, toward all noble enthusiasms. At the touch of a few words his heart overflowed with bitterness, and a cold, vindictive hate rendered the hours interminable till he could aim a bullet at his rival's heart, reckless meantime that another bullet was aimed at his.

In his walk he passed the tent in which Lieutenant Waldo and his mother were talking quietly of their home and the prospects of maintaining it during the troublous times clearly foreseen.

"Mother," said Waldo, "have you any definite idea as to the success of our arms?"

"No, Vincent, nor do I suppose we can at this remote plantation. We only know that there is heavy fighting at various points and great successes are claimed; but it seems very hard to get at the real truth. Our chief confidence must be in the sacredness and justness of our cause and in the prayers of so many sincere hearts to the God of justice. In giving you, my son, to our country, when you were scarcely more than a boy, you can understand why I feel that such sacrifices cannot be in vain. Now that I have watched beside you in your patient, heroic suffering, the feeling becomes a conviction that our sunny land must be enriched and blessed for all time by such blood as yours."

"Well, mother, I do not begrudge my blood or my life. You have taught me that to die is gain; but almost hourly I pray for recovery that I may soon rejoin my regiment and do more toward achieving our liberty. How strange it is that men of the North should be animated by much the same spirit! Miss Baron has been showing me the lovely faces of the wife and daughter of a Federal officer who died heroically a few days ago. She says the war is all a dreadful mystery to her."

"I am beginning to understand her better," replied Mrs. Waldo musingly, "for to some extent she has given me her confidence. If she had been brought up as you have been she would feel as you do. I can see why her uncle and aunts have not won her sympathy, while her cousin's conduct has been well calculated to alienate her. I can also understand why the negroes on the place have so enlisted her sympathy. I do not think they have been treated very harshly, but it is too clear that they are regarded simply as property, and Mr. Baron has allowed himself to be represented among them by a brutal, coarse-fibred man. If she had been your sister and had witnessed the spirit in which our slaves are governed and cared for she would feel as you do, not vindictive hatred of the North—such feeling is not permissible toward any of the human race—but a stern,

lofty spirit of independence, such as our fathers had in separating from England."

"Well, she is a brave, good girl, mother, and has been as kind to me as if I were her brother."

"Very true, Vincent. She is a remarkably good girl for one brought up as she has been. She has told me much about her past repressed, unhappy life. I hope she way visit us some day."

Meantime, the subject of this conversation sat at her window looking out into the warm, fragrant, starlit night. The words of Maynard, the passionate resentment of her cousin toward the young captain merely added to the heavy burden of experience which had been crowded into the past few weeks. "Oh," she sighed longingly, "if I could only see Allan Scoville! He is so strong, unselfish and restful. I could tell him everything. He would know just how weary and depressed I am, nor would he want me to do what I can't, what I'm not ready for. Oh, what a blessed thing it would be to have a friend near who wasn't always exacting or expecting or passionately urging something or other. I wouldn't need urging in his case, and would even know his hand would be the first to restrain me for my own good. Where is he now? Oh, he'd be here if my thoughts could bring him, yet my two lovers would be eager to take his life. Lovers indeed! Well, it's a strange, tangled up world that I'm learning about."

Meantime Zany, bursting with her secret, was unable to tell any one, and not yet sure she wished to tell. For one at her point of civilization her motives were a little complex and sophisticated. In a vicarious way she felt not a little the elation of many a high-born dame that two men were about to fight over her young mistress, regarding it as an undeniable compliment. She was also inclined to indulge the cynical thought that it might save Miss Lou, Scoville, Chunk—indeed, all in whom she was interested—further trouble if, as she phrased it, "Dat ar young cap'n gib Mad Whately he way onst too of'un. He des natchelly bawn

ter mek folks trouble en I reck'n we git on wid he spook bettah ner hesef.''

Whately would not have relished his supper if he had divined the thoughts of his waitress. As it was, he had little appetite for it and paid his respects chiefly to his uncle's decanter. He felt no need of false courage, but was irritated and depressed over the general aspect of affairs, and here was an easy way of raising his spirits. By the time he was ready to dispense with Zany's services he was so affected by his potations that his aunt, who had appeared on the scene, hastened his retirement. He told the sergeant of the guard to have him called at daybreak and was soon asleep.

The indomitable housekeeper, Mrs. Baron, kept the girl busy until everything was put away and the dining-room in perfect order. Meantime Zany concluded that she had better tell Miss Lou. Her young mistress might blame her severely if she did not, and keeping such a secret over night would also be a species of torture.

When she was dismissed she watched her opportunity, whisked up to Miss Lou's room, and was glad to find the girl still awake.

''Oh, Miss Lou,'' she whispered breathlessly, ''I des got de orfulest, quarest news, en I darsn't kep hit eny longer. Marse cap'n en Mad Whately gwine ter fight 'bout you fo' sun-up.''

''What!''

''Dey sut'ny is. Dey gwine ter fight one anoder 'bout you wid 'volvers—fight ter de deth dey said. I yeared dem troo de dine-room winders.''

''Oh, Zany! this is horrible!''

''Hit mout be wuss. Yo' cousin hot fer hit. He say orful tings ter marse cap'n who didin't gib back a inch en sez, sez he, 'I challing you. Shoose yo' weapons en place ob meetin'' Dem he berry words. Den yo' cousin shose 'volvers en de far side ob de grobe up dar en said 'we fight ter de deth.' Deth useter seem orful, Miss Lou, but sech

a heap ob mens die dat ef Mad Whately des set on dyin', w'y not let 'im hab he way? Dat orter suit 'im bes'. I reck'n he mek we uns en Marse Scoville en Chunk berry lil trouble arter he dead."

"Zany, Zany, that's a dreadful way to look at it. You should know better. This meeting must be prevented. Where is my cousin?"

"He des sound a sleep ez a log," and she made it clear that there would be no use in trying to remonstrate with him.

"Where's Captain Maynard?"

"Dunno. Sleepin' in he tent too, s'pose. Hit too late now, Miss Lou, ter do anyting fo' mawnin'."

The girl thought deeply a few moments and then muttered, "Shame on them both!"

"Dar now, Miss Lou, you doan reckermember dey payin' you a big compelment."

"I shall tell them to their faces how I regard this outrage rather. Still, for their sakes, as well as my own, I will keep the affair quiet if I can. Zany, you must stay with me to-night and at the earliest dawn we must watch them and be on the ground as soon as they are."

"Berry well, Miss Lou. I lak not'n bettah."

"Go to sleep, then. I won't sleep to-night."

CHAPTER XXXI

THE DUELLISTS VANQUISHED

ZANY'S tidings brought the spur of a great necessity to Miss Lou's jaded spirit, and as her waking thoughts dwelt on the proposed encounter, a slow, deep anger was kindled in her mind. "What right have they to do such a thing?" she asked herself over and over again. Even more than at the barbarism of the act she revolted at its injustice. "I never wronged either of them," she repeated, "and here they are recklessly bent on what would imbitter my life. The idea of being fought about! Two animals couldn't do worse."

And so the long night was passed in bitter, painful thoughts. With the dawning the bird's innocent songs jarred on her overwrought senses. She looked out of the window by which she had kept her vigil, inhaled the dewy freshness of the air and then bathed her tired, hot eyes.

"To think that men would disturb the peace of such a morning by their miserable, causeless hate! Where is Madison's love for his mother? Why don't they remember the distress and horror that would follow their mad act? Zany, wake up. It is time we were on the watch."

Even as she spoke there was a heavy step in the outer hall, that of the sergeant coming to wake Lieutenant Whately. Miss Lou glanced from her window in time to see Captain Maynard striding from his tent toward the grove which would screen the combatants from observation. Waiting a few moments for the sergeant to retire she and Zany slipped down and out before Whately left his room. They reached the grove from the back entrance of the house, and conceal-

ing themselves in some copse-wood, watched for Whately's coming. He soon appeared, walking rapidly as if fearing to be behind time. He was in fact some moments late, having stopped to advise Perkins of the affair on hand. He passed so near his cousin's leafy screen that she could look into his flushed, troubled face and could hear him mutter, "Curse it all! I'm forever getting into scrapes."

For the first time since Zany's news, pity overcame her anger and she murmured, "Poor spoiled boy! It's well for you and your mother that I'm here."

Swiftly she followed him through the still dusky grove, keeping the boles of trees between herself and his form. Beyond the grove was an open grassy field, facing the east, where the light was distinct. Clearly outlined against the rose-tinted horizon was the figure of Maynard standing with his arms folded and his back toward them, apparently lost in deep thought.

"Well, sir," said Whately sternly, "I suppose I should asked your pardon for keeping you waiting."

"I reckon there's plenty of time for the purpose of our meeting," replied Maynard coolly. "Since you are the challenged party and we have no seconds, arrange the matter to suit yourself."

Whately was about to pace off the ground when a girl's voice rang out clearly, "Stop that!"

"Miss Baron!" cried Maynard, taking off his hat.

Whately threw back his head proudly. This was better than he had dreamed, for now his cousin would be compelled to recognize his high and haughty spirit. A glance at the girl's pale, stern face as she stepped out between them was not altogether reassuring. She glanced coldly from one to the other for a moment and then said firmly, "I have something to say about this affair."

"Pardon me, Miss Baron," Maynard began, bowing, "if I am compelled to disabuse your mind. This is a little matter between Lieutenant Whately and myself. I am surprised beyond measure that he has invited you to be present."

"That's a lie," thundered Whately, drawing his weapon from his belt."

"Stop, both of you," cried the girl. "Captain Maynard, my cousin has not invited me. Your purpose of meeting was discovered by accident and revealed to me late last night—too late for me to do anything then. All the long night I have sat at my window that I might be in time to keep you from disgracing yourselves and me."

"Great heavens! Miss Baron, you do me injustice," cried Maynard. "I have been insulted. I never thought of wronging you. Perish such a thought!"

"Evidently neither of you has thought of me, nor cared for me or others. Yourselves, your own vindictive feelings have engrossed you wholly, yet I know I'm the innocent cause of this brutal encounter, and the world would know me to be the cause whether it believed me innocent or not. I tell you plainly that if you fight I shall brand you both unworthy the name of gentlemen and I shall proclaim to all your outrage to me."

"Outrage to you, Miss Baron?" said Maynard, with a bitter, incredulous laugh.

"Yes," she replied, turning upon him fiercely. "What can you think of me when you fight about me like a wild beast?"

"I am prepared to fight Lieutenant Whately on entirely different grounds," he replied, his face flushing hotly at her words.

"You cannot do it, sir. I would know, and so would all, that I was the cause. What right, sir, have you to imbitter my life, to fill my days and nights with horror? I never wronged you."

"But, Miss Baron, in all ages such encounters have been common enough when a man received ample provocation, as I have."

"So much the worse for the ages then. I say that you both were about to commit a selfish, cowardly, unmanly act that would have been an outrage in its cruelty to an inno-

cent girl, to whom you had been making false professions of regard."

"Now, by the God who made me, that's not true, Miss Baron."

"Cousin Lou, you are beside yourself," cried Whately.

"Miss Baron," said Maynard, coming to her side and speaking with great earnestness, "I can endure any charge better than your last. No man ever declared truer love than I to you."

"I can tell you of a man who has declared truer love," she replied, looking him steadily in the eyes.

"Who in God's name?" he asked savagely.

"*Any* man who thought more of the girl than of himself," she answered with passionate pathos in her tones, "any man who considered her before his own reckless, ungovernable feelings, who would save her heart from sorrow rather than gratify his anger. Any man who asks, What is best for the woman I love? instead of What's my humor? what will please me? Suppose you both had carried out your savage impulses, and lay on this ground, wounded or dead, what would be said at the house there about me? What would be your mother's fate, Madison, that you might gratify a causeless spite? Have you no home, Captain Maynard, no kindred who would always curse my name? If you had died like the brave men who lie in yonder graves your friends would ever speak your name proudly; but even I, all inexperienced, know the world well enough to be only too sure, they would hang their heads and say you flung away your life for a heartless girl who was amusing herself at your expense. Fight if you will, but if you do, I pledge you my word that I will never willingly look upon either of you again, living or dead!"

She was about to turn away when Maynard rushed before her exclaiming, "Miss Baron, I beg your pardon, I ask your forgiveness. I never saw this act in the light you place it."

"There, cousin," added Whately with a sort of shame-

faced laugh, "I'm hanged if you aren't in the right and I in the wrong again. As you say, the bullet that killed me might do worse by mother, and I should have thought of that. As for you, we didn't think you'd look at it this way. There's plenty of girls who'd think it a big feather in their caps to have men fight about 'em."

"I can't believe it."

"It's true, nevertheless," said Maynard earnestly. "What can I do to right myself in your eyes?"

"If you wish to be men whose friendship I can value, shake hands and use your weapons for your country. If you truly care for my good opinion, forget yourselves long enough to find out what *does* please me and not rush headlong into action I detest. Consider the rights, feelings and happiness of others."

"Well, Whately, what do you say?" asked Maynard with a grim laugh. "I am ready to obey Miss Baron as I would my superior officer," and he held out his hand.

Whately took it with an answering laugh, saying, "There's nothing else left us to do. After her words, we could no more fight each other than shoot her."

"Thank you. I—I—Zany," she faltered, turning deathly white. She would have fallen had not her cousin sprung to her aid, supporting her to a seat on a moss-grown log lying near.

For a few moments the long strain and reaction proved too much for her, and she sat, pale and panting, her head resting against Zany, who had rushed from her covert. The young men were overwhelmed with compunction and alarm, but she retained and silenced them by a gesture. "I'll be—better—in a moment," she gasped.

It proved but a partial giving way of her nervous force. In a few moments she added, "Please go back to the house by different ways. No one need know anything about this. No, don't call any one. I'll get better faster if left with Zany. I beg you do as I ask and then my mind will be at rest."

"There, Miss Baron," said the remorseful Maynard, "I pledge you my word I'll never fight a duel. I can prove my courage sufficiently against the enemy."

She smiled, held out her hand, which he carried to his lips and reluctantly departed.

"See here, Cousin Lou," said Whately impulsively, "I'm going to give you an honest, cousinly kiss. I'm not so feather-headed as not to know you've got us both out of a devil of a scrape."

He suited the action to his words, and strode off in time to intercept Perkins, who had the scent of a vulture for a battle. "We have arranged the affair for the present," said the young officer curtly, "and won't need any graves to-day. Keep mum about this."

"I'll keep my mouth close enough till I kin begin ter bite on my own account," muttered the overseer as he sullenly followed.

CHAPTER XXXII

SAD TIDINGS

THAT morning Miss Lou stood on the veranda and bade farewell, one after another, to those with whom she had been associated so strangely and unexpectedly. There was an unwonted huskiness in Dr. Borden's voice, and Ackley, usually so grim and prompt, held the girl's hand lingeringly as he tried to make a joke about her defying him and the whole Confederacy. It was a dismal failure. Regarding him with her weary eyes, she said:

"Doctor, you had wit enough and heart enough to understand and subdue me. Haven't I minded you since?"

"I'm a little afraid you'd still get the upper hand if you often looked at me as you do now. I shall find out, however, if you will obey one more order. Miss Baron, you *must* rest. Your pulse indicates unusual exhaustion. You have tried to do too much, and I expect those young men have been making such fierce and counter claims that you are all worn out. Ah, if I had been only twenty years younger I would have won you by a regular course of scientific love-making."

"I don't know anything about science and wouldn't understand you. So it is better as it is, for I do understand what a good, kind friend you've been. You knew all the while that I was little more than an ignorant child, yet your courtesy was so fine that you treated me like a woman. I hope we shall meet again in brighter days. Yes, I will obey you, for I feel the need of rest."

"I shall come again and take my chances," said Maynard in parting.

Mercurial Whately, forgetting his various troubles and experiences in the excitement of change and return to active duty, bade her a rather boisterous and good-hearted farewell. His mind was completely relieved as to Maynard, and he did not dream of Scoville as a serious rival.

"It's only a question of time," he thought, "and at present mother can do the courting better than I can. When I return Lou will be so desperately bored by her stupid life here as to be ready for any change."

The remaining patients looked at her and Mrs. Whately very wistfully and gratefully, speaking reluctant adieus. When all were gone the girl, feeling that she had reached the limit of endurance, went to her room and slept till evening. It was the sleep of exhaustion, so heavy that she came down to a late supper weak and languid. But youth is elastic, the future full of infinite possibilities. Scoville's words haunted her like sweet refrains of music. No matter how weary, perplexed and sad she was, the certainty of her place in his thoughts and heart sustained her and was like a long line of light in the west, indicating a clearing storm. "He *will* come again," she often whispered to herself; "he said he would if he had to come on crutches. Oh, he *does* love me. He gave me his love that night direct, warm from his heart, because he couldn't help himself. He thought he loved me before—when, by the run, he told me of it so quietly, so free from all exaction and demands; but I didn't feel it. It merely seemed like bright sunshine of kindness and goodwill, very sweet and satisfying then. But when we were parting, when his tones trembled so, when overcome, he lost restraint and snatched me to *his* heart—then I learned that *I*, too, had a heart."

If she had been given time this new heart-life, with thoughts and hopes springing from it like flowers, would have restored her elasticity. Scoville's manly visage, his eyes, so often mirthful, always kind, would have become so real to her fancy that the pallid, drawn features of the suffering, the dying and the dead, would have faded from

her memory. So would have faded also the various aspects of passion from which she had shrunk, frightened by its hot breath. Her days would have been filled with the beautiful, innocent dreams of a young girl's first love so inspired as to cast out fear.

But the ruthless Moloch of war could not permit anything so ideal, so heavenly, as this.

Mrs. Waldo came down from the apartment to which her son had been removed and joined the girl on the veranda. "Ah!" she exclaimed, "I have taken solid comfort all day in the thought that you were sleeping, and now you are still resting. I want to see the color in your cheeks again, and the tired look all gone from your eyes before we go."

"You don't know how I dread to have you go," replied Miss Lou. "From the first your son did more for me than I could do for him. The smile with which he always greeted me made me feel that nothing could happen beyond remedy, and so much that was terrible was happening."

"Well, my child, that's the faith I am trying to cherish myself and teach my boy. It is impossible for you to know what a black gulf opened at my feet when my noble husband was killed early in the war. Such things, happily, are known only by experience, and many escape. Then our cause demanded my only son. I face death with him in every battle, every danger. He takes risks without a thought of fear, and I dare not let him know the agony of my fear. Yet in my widowhood, in the sore pressure of care and difficulty in managing a large plantation in these times, I have found my faith in God's love adequate to my need. I should still find it so if I lost my boy. I could not escape the suffering, but I would not sorrow as without hope."

"How much I would give for the certainty of such a faith!" said Miss Lou sadly. "Sometimes, since Captain Hanfield died, I think I feel it. And then—oh, I don't know. Things might happen which I couldn't meet in your

spirit. If I had been compelled to marry my cousin I feel that I should have become hard, bitter and reckless."

"You poor, dear little girl! Well, you were not compelled to marry him. Don't you see? We are saved from some things and given strength to bear what does happen. Don't you worry about yourself, my dear. Just look up and trust. Happily, the sun of God's love shines on just the same, unaffected by the passing clouds of our feelings and experiences. He sees the end and knows all about the peaceful, happy eternity before us. You dear, worn-out little child! His love is ever about you like my arms at this moment," and the old lady drew the girl to her in an impulse of motherly tenderness.

"Oh, Mrs. Waldo, you make me feel what it is to have no mother," sobbed Miss Lou.

"Well, my dear, that's your heavy cross. Sooner or later, in some form, a cross burdens every human soul, too often many crosses. All I ask of you is not to try to bear them alone. See how faith changed everything for Captain Hanfield in his extremity. He is now in the better home, waiting for his dear ones."

"I can never forget what faith has done for you and your son, Mrs. Waldo. Surgeon Ackley said that your son's absolute quiet and cheerfulness of mind during the first critical days saved his life."

"Yes, I know that," Mrs. Waldo replied with her low, sweet laugh. "Faith is often more useful in helping us to live than in preparing us to die. It saved my life, too, I'm sure, after my husband died. I had no right to die then, for Vincent and, far more, my daughters, still needed me."

For a time they sat on the piazza steps in silence, the old lady keeping her arm caressingly about the girl, whose head drooped on the motherly bosom overflowing with sympathy. Only the semi-tropical sounds of night broke the stillness. The darkness was relieved by occasional flashes along the horizon from a distant thunder-shower.

Miss Lou thought, "Have I ever known a peace so deep and sweet as this?"

There was a hasty, yet stealthy step along the hall to the door, yet the girl had no presentiment of evil. The warm, brooding, fragrant darkness of the night was not more undisturbed than her mind.

"Miss Lou," said Zany in a loud whisper.

What a shock came with that brief utterance! A flash of lightning direct from the sky could not have produced such sudden dread and presentiment of trouble. Truly, a woman listens more with her heart than her ears, and even in Zany's whisper there was detected a note of tragedy.

After an instant Miss Lou faltered, "What is it, Zany?"

"Ef you gwine ter yo' room soon I des he'p you undress."

How well the girl knew that the faithful slave meant other and less prosaic help! She rose at once, kissed Mrs. Waldo good-night and excused herself. When Zany had lighted the candle her scared, troubled face revealed at once that she had tidings of dire import.

Miss Lou seized the girl with a grip which hurt her arm, demanding, "Have you heard anything about—about Lieutenant Scoville?"

"Now, Miss Lou, you gotter be brabe en not look at me dat away. Kaze ef you does, w'at I gwine ter do? I kyant stan' it nohow."

"Oh! oh!" Miss Lou gasped, "wait a moment, not yet—wait. I must get breath. I know, I know what's coming. Chunk is back and—and—O God, I can't bear it, I cannot, I cannot!"

"Dar now, Miss Lou, des lis'n. P'raps tain ez bad ez you tink. P'raps w'en Chunk 'splain all you see tain ez bad. Hi! Miss Lou, you musn't took on so," for the girl was wringing her hands and rocking back and forth in agony. "Folks s'picion dat Chunk yere en dat ud be de eend ob him, sho. He ain' seen Marse Scoville daid sho. He on'y see 'im fall. Chunk wanter see you en he mighty

skeery 'bout hit, kaze ef Perkins get on he track he done fer. He ain' see he granny yit en he darsn't come dar twel hit late. He larn ter toot lak a squinch-owl frum Marse Scoville en he tole me dat when he come agin he toot. I nigh on run my legs off follerin' up tootin's o' nights, fer dey wuz on'y pesky squinch-owls arter all. Dis eb'nin' I year a toot dat flutter my heart big en I knowed 'twuzn't no squinch-owl dis time, sho," and so Zany ran on in her canny shrewdness, for she perceived she was gaining Miss Lou's attention and giving time for recovery from the blow.

Miss Lou had a despairing conviction that Chunk would not have returned alone unless his master was dead, but her mind quickly seized upon the element of uncertainty and she was eager to see the negro.

"We mus' wait, we sut'ny mus', twel Chunk kin creep ter he granny's cabin."

"I can't wait, Zany. It wouldn't be best, either for me or Chunk. It's not very late yet, and I could visit Aun' Jinkey without exciting remark if you go with me. It's too dark for Chunk to be seen and I'd protect him with my life. I must get better ground for hope or my heart will break. Pretend I wish a glass of water and see if we can't slip out now."

This Zany did, discovering that Mrs. Baron was with her husband in his office and that Mrs. Waldo had returned to her son's room.

In a few moments Miss Lou was sitting by Aun' Jinkey and tremblingly telling her fears. Meanwhile Zany scouted around to insure immunity from observation.

"You po', po' chile!" groaned Aun' Jinkey. "I wuz a-hopin' dat now you hab a time ob peace en quietness, en you des gwine ter be s'pended 'twixt hebin en yearth."

"Oh, I fear he's dead, my heart tells me he's dead. Oh, mammy, mammy, how can God be so cruel? I don't know who caused this war or who's to blame, but I feel now as if I could *torture* them."

"I'se feared dat ain' de right speret, honey."

"How can one have the right spirit when mocked by such a hope as I've had? It needn't have happened. Oh, Mrs. Waldo, I could tell you *now* I'm no Christian at all. I say it needn't have happened. And then think how Uncle Lusthah prayed!"

"Chunk down dar by de run, Miss Lou," whispered Zany. "I lis'n wid all my years en eyes."

"Miss Lou, I'se yere in de shadder ob dis bush," Chunk called softly.

"Tell me everything."

"Darsn't twel I feels mo' safe, Miss Lou. Kin on'y say now Marse Scoville des dote on you en he ax questions 'bout you sence you lil gyurl. Hun'erds ob times he say, 'Chunk, we go back some day, sho!' But he do he duty brabe. I go wid 'im ev'ywhar en onst, des on de aige ob night, he wuz ridin' long wid 'bout twenty ob he men en dis ting happen. We didn't tink any Rebs roun' en I'd been kep' back tryn' ter git a chicken fer mars'r's supper. Ez I riz a hill, ridin' right smart I see our folks goin' easy en car'less inter a woods. I seed 'em all ez plain ez eber see anybody, en Marse Scoville ride at de haid. Sudden dere was flash, flash, bang, bang, all troo de woods. Marse Scoville fell right off he hoss, he sut'ny did. Den lots ob Johnnies run in de road fore en hind our mens. I see dere wuz no chaince fer me ter do any ting but git away en lil chaince fer dat, fer two Rebs on horses come tarin' arter me. Ef hit hadn't come dark sudden en my hoss wuzn't a flyer I'se been cotched sho. 'Fo' de Lawd, Miss Lou, dat all I know."

"He's dead," said the girl in a hoarse whisper.

"I orful feared he is, Miss Lou," assented the matter-of-fact Chunk. "De Rebs so neah w'en dey fiah, en Marse Scoville sut'ny did go off he hoss sudden. I been a week gittin' yere en I neber git yere ef de cullud people didn't he'p me long nights."

The girl stood silent and motionless. Suddenly Zany

grasped her hand and whispered, "I yeared steps. Come ter de cabin. Be off, Chunk."

They had scarcely reached Aun' Jinkey's door before a shadow approached and the harsh voice of Perkins asked, "What's goin' on yere?"

"My young mistis des seein' her mammy 'bout her clos," replied the quick-witted Zany.

"I thought I yeared voices down by the run."

"Reck'n you bettah go see," said Zany in rather high tones.

"What the dev—what makes yer speak so loud? a warnin'?"

"Tain' my place ter pass wuds wid you, Marse Perkins. Dem I serbs doan fin' fault."

"I reckon Mr. Baron'll do mo'n find fault 'fore long. I bettah say right yere en now I've got my orders 'bout that nigger Chunk. Nobody kin save 'im ef caught. You've been followed before in your night-cruisin' en you're lookin' fer some one. Ef there's trouble, Miss Baron kyant say I didn't give warnin'. Now that the sogers is gone I'm held 'sponsible fer what goes on," and he stalked away.

He did not wish to come into an open collision with Miss Lou again if he could help it—not at least while the Waldos remained. He had concluded that by a warning he might prevent trouble, his self-interest inclining him to be conservative. Confederate scrip had so lost its purchasing power that in its stead he had recently bargained with Mr. Baron for a share in the crops. Thus it happened that the question of making a crop was uppermost in his mind. Until this object was secured he feared to array the girl openly against him, since her influence might be essential in controlling the negroes. If policy could keep them at work, well and good; if the harshest measures seemed best to him he was ready to employ them.

Not only was he puzzled, but Zany also and Aun' Jinkey were sore perplexed at Miss Lou's silence. She had stood motionless and unheeding through the colloquy with the

overseer, and now remained equally deaf and unresponsive to the homely expressions of sympathy and encouragement of the two women. They could not see her face, but quickly felt the dread which anything abnormal inspires in the simple-minded. Prone to wild abandon in the expression of their own strong emotions, the silent, motionless figure of the young girl caused a deeper apprehension than the most extravagant evidences of grief.

"Aun' Jinkey," whispered Zany, "you mus' des he'p me git her to her room."

She went with them without word or sign. Their alarm was deepened when they saw her deathly pale and almost rigid features by the light of her candle.

"Miss Lou, honey, speak ter yo' ole mammy. You broke my heart w'en you look dat away."

"I tell you he's dead," whispered the girl.

"Dis ter'ble," groaned the old woman. " 'Fo' de Lawd I dunno w'at er do."

Zany felt instinctively that the girl was beyond their simple ministrations and she was desperately afraid that if Mrs. Baron came Chunk's presence would be revealed by words spoken unconsciously. She and Aun' Jinkey promptly agreed that Mrs. Waldo was their only hope and Zany flew to summon her.

Fortunately the lady had not retired and she came at once. "Louise, Miss Baron, what is the matter?" she asked in strong solicitude.

"I tell you, he's dead," again whispered the girl, looking as if a scene of horror were before her eyes. "The Rebs were so near when they fired, and he fell off his horse sudden. Ch—"

Quick as light Zany's hand was over the girl's mouth. The scared face and trembling form of the young negress did not escape Mrs. Waldo's quick eye.

"Zany, what are you concealing?" she asked, sternly. "What does all this mean?"

"Dar now, misus," answered Aun' Jinkey with a certain

simple dignity, "we mus' des trus you. I'se yeared you a lubin' serbent ob de Lawd. Ef you is, you ain' gwine ter bring mis'ry on mis'ry. We mus' brung Miss Lou roun' sudden 'fo' ole miss comes. He'p us git young mistis sens'ble en I tell you eberyting I kin. Dere ain' -not'n bade 'bout dis honey lam' ob mine."

They undressed the girl as if she were a helpless child and put her to bed, and then Zany went downstairs to keep Mrs. Baron out of the way if possible, at the same time listening intently for any signs of trouble to Chunk.

Miss Lou's over-taxed mind had given way, or rather was enchained by a spell of horror to the scenes presented all too vividly in Chunk's bald statement. Her nervous force had been too enfeebled and exhausted to endure the shock of an impression so tremendous in its tragic reality that her faculties had no power to go beyond it. Chunk's words had brought her to a darkening forest and her dead lover, and there she stayed.

Seeing how unconscious she was Aun' Jinkey whispered enough in explanation to enable Mrs. Waldo to comprehend the girl's condition.

"We must make her sleep," said the lady decisively, and under her wise ministrations the stricken girl soon looked almost as if she were dead. Having kindly re-assured and dismissed Aun' Jinkey, Mrs. Waldo watched Miss Lou as she would have kept vigil with one of her own daughters.

CHAPTER XXXIII

CONSPIRATORS

PERKINS was very ill at ease that night, from a haunting suspicion that Chunk had returned. "Pesky nigger'll have a revolver, too, most likely, en be crazy ter use it! Haint been 'mong them cussed Yanks fer nothin'!" There was therefore little disposition for a night hunt after one who knew every inch of the region besides being as stealthy and agile as a cat. The blow from which his head still ached had a warning significance. Coarse, ignorant and superstitious, he was an easy victim to the tormenting fears of his own bad conscience. The graves by the run and the extemporized cemetery further away had even greater terrors for him than for Aun' Jinkey. Even his whiskey jug could not inspire sufficient courage to drive him at night far from his own door. Though both hating and despising Whately, yet the absence of the young officer and his force was now deeply regretted, as they had lent a sense of security and maintained the old order of existing authority. Now he was thrown chiefly on his own responsibility, for Mr. Baron was broken and enfeeled by what he had passed through. Avarice spurned Perkins to carry through the crops in which he had an interest, while his hope of revenge on Chunk, Scoville and Miss Lou also tended to keep him at a post which he foresaw would be one of difficulty and danger. He had no doubt that the Union officer and his freedman would return as soon as they could, and for the chance of wreaking his vengeance he was the more willing to remain in what he

feared would be a spook-infested region. "Onst squar with them, en crops realized," he muttered, "I kin feel mo' comft'ble in other parts. To-morrer, ef Chunk en that scout's in these diggin's I'll know hit."

He was aware that the few dogs left on the plantation would make no trouble for one they knew as well as they did Chunk, but he could rely on the brute which he kept in his own quarters—a bloodhound, savage to every one except his master.

"Grip will smell out the cussed nigger in the mawnin' ef he's been around," he assured himself before beginning his nightly debauch. "What's mo', Miss Baron ain't so high en mighty now she knows I'm comin' to be the rale boss on the place. She didn't even squeak w'en I gin my warnin' ter night."

Although Chunk knew his danger and was cautious, he was disposed on the first night of his arrival to take some serious risks in order to carry out the schemes dwelt upon during the long days of skulking home. Naturally fearless he had acquired much of Scoville's soldier-like and scouting spirit. The young officer had associated his dwarfish follower with the service rendered by Miss Lou and was correspondingly grateful. Chunk therefore received much consideration and good counsel by which he had profited. Especially had Scoville scoffed at the negro's superstitions, telling him that a fool afraid of spooks was neither fit to be a free man nor a soldier.

Since Chunk had no imagination and believed absolutely in his master there were no more "spooks" for him, but he knew well the dread inspired by that word on the plantation, and it was his purpose to avail himself of these deep-rooted fears. He heard the colloquy between Zany and the overseer very distinctly, but so far from running away, dogged the latter home. Long knife and revolver were handy in his belt and a heavy club was carried also. Since no soldiers were around, Perkins was not to be dreaded in the night, when once his resting-place was known. Crouch-

ing a long time in the shadow of some cedars Chunk watched the overseer's window, but the light was not extinguished. A sudden suspicion dawned on our watcher, causing him to chuckle low with delight. "Hi! he des feared of sleepin' in de dark, en dat can'le bu'n all night!" Gliding a few steps nearer brought to the quick ear a resounding snore, accompanied with a warning growl from the bloodhound. "I des fix 'em bof fo' I froo," and the brawny hand clutched with greater force the heavy club it carried.

"Nex', some dem fellers mus' be tole ter he'p," and Chunk crept away to the quarters. It was an easy task to waken and enlist Jute, well known to be one of the most disaffected and fearless among the hands. The two started off to a grove which none could approach without being seen, and had a long whispered consultation. As a result, Jute returned to the quarters and brought back three others whom he knew would enter into the schemes on foot. By midnight Chunk had six of the braver and more reckless spirits among the slaves bound to him by such uncouth oaths as he believed would hold them most strongly. Then they returned to their cabins while the chief conspirator (after again reconnoitring the overseer's cottage) sought the vicinity of his granny's home.

With mistaken kindness and much shrewdness Chunk had resolved upon a course that would fill the old woman's life with terror. He adopted the policy of not letting her know anything of his plans, so that she could honestly say "I dunno" and prove the fact by her manner. He instinctively felt that it would have a very bad look if superstitious Aun' Jinkey remained composed and quiet through the scenes he purposed to bring about. Her sincere and very apparent fears were to be his allies. It was part of his scheme also that Zany should be very badly frightened and made eager to run away with him as soon as he and the others were ready for departure.

By a preconcerted signal he summoned Aun' Jinkey who was much affected by the thought that she was bidding her

grandson a good-by which might be final, but oppressed with fear, she was at the same time eager he should go. Putting into his hands a great pone of corn bread she urged, "Des light out, Chunk, light out sud'n. 'Twix de baid news en Miss Lou en w'at Perkins do ef he cotch you, I des dat trembly, I kyant stan'."

"Perkins asleep, granny. I'se off now fer good, but I comin' back fer you some day."

He disappeared, and too perturbed to think of sleep the old woman tottered back to her chimney-corner. A few moments later she shuddered at the hooting of a screech-owl, even though she surmised Chunk to be the bird. Not so Zany, who answered the signal promptly. In a tentative way Chunk sought to find if she was then ready to run away, but Zany declared she couldn't leave Miss Lou "lookin' ez if she wuz daid." Thinking it might be long indeed before she saw her suitor again, she vouchsafed him a very affectionate farewell which Chunk remorselessly prolonged, having learned in his brief campaigning not to leave any of the goods the gods send to the uncertainties of the future. When at last he tore himself away, he muttered, "Speck she need a heap ob scarin' en she git all she wants. Ef dat ar gyurl doan light out wid me nex' time I ax her, den I eats a mule." And then Chunk apparently vanished from the scene.

The next morning Miss Lou awoke feeble, dazed and ill. In a little while her mind rallied sufficiently to recall what had happened, but her symptoms of nervous prostration and lassitude were alarming. Mrs. Whately was sent for, and poor Mr. Baron learned, as by another surgical operation, what had been his share in imposing on his niece too severe a strain. Mrs. Waldo whispered to Miss Lou, "Your mammy has told me enough to account for the shock you received and your illness. Your secret is safe with me."

Meantime the good lady thought, "It will all turn out for the best for the poor child. Such an attachment could only end unhappily, and she will get over it all the sooner

if she believes the Yankee officer dead. How deeply her starved nature must have craved sympathy and affection to have led to this in such a brief time and opportunity!"

As may be supposed, Aun' Jinkey had been chary of details and had said nothing of Scoville's avowal. The mistress of the plantation looked upon her niece's illness as a sort of well earned "judgment for her perversity," but all the same, she took care that the strongest beef tea was made and administered regularly. Mrs. Whately arrived and became chief watcher. The stricken girl's physical weakness seemed equalled only by a dreary mental apathy. There was scarcely sufficient vital force left even for suffering, a fact recognized by the aunt in loving and remorseful solicitude.

By the aid of his bloodhound Perkins discovered that some one whom he believed to be Chunk had been about, and he had secret misgivings as he thought of the negro's close proximity. He had already learned what a blow Chunk could deal and his readiness to strike. Taking the dog and his gun he had cautiously followed the run into which the tracks led until satisfied that the man he was following had taken horse and was beyond pursuit. On his return he learned of Miss Lou's illness and so ventured to threaten Aun' Jinkey.

"Yer do know 'bout that cussed grandson o' yourn. Kyant fool Grip, en he' smelled out all the nigger's tracks. Now ef yer don't tell the truth I'll raise the kentry 'roun' en we'll hunt 'im to the eends of the yearth."

"Well den, Marse Perkins," admitted the terror-stricken woman, "I des tell you de truf. Dat gran'boy ob min' des come ter say good-by. Marse Scoville daid en Chunk mos' up Norf by dis time, he went away so sud'n."

"That Yankee cuss dead?" cried Perkins in undisguised exultation.

"Marse Scoville daid, shot of'n he hoss long way f'um yere," replied Aun' Jinkey sorrowfully. "He kyant harm you ner you 'im no mo', ner Chunk neider."

"Why the devil didn't you let us know Chunk was here las' night?"

"He my gran'son," was the simple reply.

"Well he isn't Zany's grandson! Now I know w'at she was snoopin' round nights fer, en Mrs. Baron'll know, too, 'fore I'm five minutes older."

Aun' Jinkey threw up her hands and sank back into her chair more dead than alive. She, too, had been taxed beyond endurance and all her power to act had ceased with her final effort to show that pursuit of Chunk would be useless.

Perkins speedily obtained an audience with Mrs. Baron, who became deeply incensed and especially against Zany. The inexorable old lady, however, never acted from passion. She nodded coldly to the overseer, saying, "I will inform Mr. Baron and he will give you your orders in regard to the offenders."

Zany was too alert not to observe the interview and the omens of trouble in the compressed lips of "ole miss" and the steel-like gleam of her eyes. The moment Mrs. Baron was closeted with her husband the girl sped to the cabin. "Did you tell Perkins Chunk been yere?" she demanded fiercely.

"Fo' de Lawd I des gwine all ter pieces," gasped Aun' Jinkey.

"Hope ter grashus yer does, en de pieces neber come tergedder agin," said Zany in contemptuous anger and deep alarm.

Under the spur of tremendous excitement she hastened back, thinking as she ran, "Miss Lou too sick ter do anyting. I des got ter 'peal ter Miss Whately, er ole miss hab me whipped haf ter daith." When in response to a timid knock Mrs. Whately peered out of her niece's room she found a trembling suppliant with streaming eyes. Noiselessly shutting the door the matron said warningly:

"Don't you know Miss Lou's life depends on quiet?"

"How she gwine ter hab quiet w'en ole miss gwine ter hab Marse Perkins whip me'n Aun' Jinkey ter daith?"

"Nonsense! Why should either of you be punished?"

"Well missus, I 'fess ter you," sobbed Zany, "kaze you got more feelin' fer us. Chunk come las' night ter say good-by ter he granny'n me, en den he put out fer good, en ain' comin' back no mo'. Perkins en he dog foun' hit out dis mawnin', en Aun' Jinkey tole 'im, too, I reck'n, she all broke up. Perkins been talkin' ter ole miss en she look lak she al'ways does w'en ders no let up. Hit ud des kill Miss Lou if she knew me'n Aun' Jinkey wuz bein' whipped."

"Zany," said Mrs. Whately in rising anger, "you both had full warning. You knew what Chunk had done. He stole my son's horse and one from his master also, beside doing other things that could not be forgiven."

"Please reckermember, missus, dat Chunk en me is mighty sweet on each oder en he Aun' Jinkey gran'boy. Tain' dat we 'prove of his goin's on, but how cud we tell on 'im en see 'im daid, w'en he des come ter say good-by. Oh, ef Miss Lou on'y well she neber let dat ole Perkins tech us."

"I will see your master before anything is done," said Mrs. Whately with troubled face. "Go to your work now. I will get Mrs. Waldo to watch in my place after a while."

Mr. Baron was depressed physically and mentally by the trying events of the past few weeks, but the fact that Chunk had ventured on the place again and had been permitted to escape angered him deeply. He also accepted the view of his wife and overseer that all discipline among the slaves would soon be at an end if so serious an offence were overlooked. It would be a confession of weakness and fear they believed which would have a most demoralizing effect in the quarters. Chunk represented the worst offences of which the slaves could be guilty; the most solemn warnings had been given against aiding and abetting him in any way. To do nothing now would be a virtual permission of law-

lessness. There was no thought of mercy for Zany, but Aun' Jinkey's age, feebleness, together with her relations to Chunk and Miss Lou, complicated matters.

Husband and wife were still consulting when Mrs. Whately joined them. Mrs. Baron did not welcome her guest, feeling that this was purely a personal affair, and was in no mood to brook interference.

"I can't be absent long," began Mrs. Whately, "Zany has told me everything and—"

"I think, sister, that Mr. Baron and I can manage this matter," interrupted Mrs. Baron coolly.

"No doubt you can," Mrs. Whately replied with dignity. "I did not come down to interfere with your domestic affairs. There is one point on which I have a right to speak and must speak. You can't punish Aun' Jinkey and Zany now if knowledge of such punishment can in any way reach our niece. No matter how much they may deserve it, I say you cannot do it. I promised Zany nothing, held out no hope to her of escape, but to you I will speak plainly. If you should excite and disturb Louise now, you might easily cause her death. If you feel that you cannot overlook the offence (and I know how serious a one it is) wait till I can remove Louise to my own house. You will find that Dr. Pelton when he arrives will confirm my words."

Mr. Baron weakened. He had not the relentless will of his wife, who interposed with cutting emphasis, "There is no need of Louise's knowing anything about it till she is much better, and it would be well for her to learn then, as well as the slaves, that there is still a master and mistress."

"It may be long before Louise is much better," Mrs. Whately replied gravely. "She has been subjected to a strain for which my conscience reproaches me, however it may be with yours. She is in a very critical state, and seemingly from some recent shock."

"Can the news Chunk brought have had any such effect?" broke forth Mrs. Baron indignantly—"news of

the death of that Yankee whom she met and treated as a social equal sorely against my will?"

"Lieutenant Scoville dead!" exclaimed Mrs. Whately looking shocked and sad.

"Yes, so Chunk told his granny."

Mrs. Whately was troubled indeed. Perhaps there had been much more than she had suspected. If so, this fact would account for the girl's extreme prostration. To bring these tidings might have been one of Chunk's chief motives in venturing on his brief visit. Miss Lou might know all about the visit and even have seen Chunk herself. If this were true, punishment of those who were in a sense her accomplices would be all the more disastrous. The perplexed matron felt that she must have more time to think and to acquire fuller knowledge of the affair.

"Brother," she said finally, "you are the guardian of Louise and in authority. She is now helpless and at present quiet. If quiet of mind and body can be maintained long enough she will no doubt get well. In a sense I am now her physician, and I say as Surgeon Ackley said of his patients, she cannot be disturbed. I positively forbid it. Dr. Pelton who must soon be here will take the same ground. Public opinion will support him and me in holding you responsible if you order anything endangering your ward's life and health at this time. Mrs. Waldo and her son would be witnesses. How far the former is acquainted with affairs we do not know. She watched with Louise all last night. If you act hastily you may be sorry indeed. I am trying kindness and conciliation with my people and they are doing better. I fear your policy is mistaken. Chunk is gone and beyond punishment. It is asking much to expect that his grandmother and the girl who loves him after her fashion would give information against him. It would seem that only the two slaves and Perkins know of this visit. Affairs are bad enough with you as it is and you can easily make them much worse. If you must punish for effect, take some stout field hand who is insubordinate

or lazy. At any rate I love Louise and hope some day to call her daughter, and I will not have her life endangered. That's all I have to say."

Mr. Baron's flame of anger had died out. His views had not been changed by his harsh experience, but he had been compelled to see that there were times when he could not have his own way. So he said testily, "Well, well, we'll have to let the matter rest a while, I suppose."

Mrs. Whately departed. Mrs. Baron put her thin lips together in a way which meant volumes, and went out on her housekeeping round, giving orders to Zany in sharper, more metallic tones than usual. The delinquent herself had overheard enough of the conversation to learn that the evil day had at least been put off and to get some clew as to the future.

CHAPTER XXXIV

CHUNK PLAYS SPOOK

SINCE Mr. Baron had yielded for the present, Mrs. Whately was glad nothing need be said to the physician concerning their affairs. His positive injunction of quiet was sufficient, and now that Mr. Baron was impressed with its need and had had time for sober second thought, he concluded that he had trouble enough on hand as it was. He felt that every quiet day gained was so much toward securing the absolutely essential crops. Perkins was therefore summoned and the situation in part explained.

The overseer was in unusual good-humor over the death of Scoville, and if Chunk had escaped finally, there was compensation in the thought of having no more disturbance from that source. So, fortunately for poor Zany, avarice came to the fore and Perkins agreed that the best thing to do was to bend every energy to "making the crops," using severity only in the furtherance of this end.

"Beg pardon, Mr. Baron, but I must have sump'n up and down clar. There's been so many bosses of late en my orders been knocked eendwise so of'en that I don't know, en the hands don't know whether I've got any po'r or no. Ef this thing 'bout Chunk gits out, en nobody punished, the fiel'-hans natchelly think we darsn't punish. Mought es well give up then."

"Punish as much as you think necessary to keep the quarter-hands at work. Then it is plain," replied Mr. Baron.

Very seldom had Perkins been in so complacent and

exultant a mood as when he left the presence of Mr. Baron that morning. But his troubles began speedily. Jute had slept little the night before and was stupid and indifferent to his work in the afternoon. Finding threats had little effect, the overseer struck a blow with his cane. The negro turned fiercely but was confronted with a revolver. He resumed work doggedly, his sullen look spreading like the shadow of a cloud to the faces of the others. So many began to grow indifferent and reckless that to punish all was out of the question. Perkins stormed and threatened, striking some here and there, almost beside himself from increasing anxiety and rage. Whichever way he turned a dark vindictive face met his eyes. The slaves had enjoyed a brief sense and sweet hope of freedom; he was seeking to refasten the yoke with brutal hands and it galled as never before. Even his narrow arbitrary nature was impressed with the truth that a great change was taking place; that a proclamation issued hundreds of miles away was more potent than his heavy hand. He was as incapable of any policy other than force as was his employer of abandoning the grooves in which his thoughts had always run.

The worrisome afternoon finally ended, leaving the harassed man free to seek consolation from his jug. Mr. Baron relapsed into his quiet yet bitter mental protest. "Ole miss" maintained inexorable discipline over the yard and house slaves, keeping all busy in removing every stain and trace of the hospital. She governed by fear also, but it was the fear which a resolute, indomitable will produces in weaker natures.

Mrs. Waldo already felt uncomfortable. There was no lack of outward courtesy, but the two women had so little in common that there was almost a total absence of sympathy between them. The guests through the fortune of war resolved therefore to depart in a day or two, making the journey home by easy stages. Mrs. Whately was both polite and cordial, but she also felt that the family should be alone as soon as possible, that they were facing problems

which could better be solved without witnesses. It was her hope now to nurse her charge back to health, and, by the utmost exercise of tact, gain such an ascendency over the girl as to win her completely. Granting that the matron's effort was part of a scheme, it was one prompted by deep affection, a yearning to call her niece daughter and to provide for the idolized son just the kind of wife believed to be essential to his welfare. Much pondering on the matter led her to believe that even if the tidings of Scoville's death had been the cause of the final prostrating shock, it was but the slight blow required to strike down one already feeble and tottering to her fall. "He probably made a strong, but necessarily a passing impression on the dear child's mind," she reasoned. "When she gets well she will think of him only as she does of the other Union soldiers who so interested her."

The object of this solicitude was docile and quiet, taking what was given her, but evidently exhausted beyond the power of thought or voluntary action.

The night passed apparently without incident, but it was a busy one for Chunk. He again summoned Jute and his other confederates to a tryst in the grove to impress them with his plans. It was part of his scheme to permit a few nights to pass quietly so that disturbances would not be associated with him, he being supposed far away. In the depths of the adjacent forest he had found safe shelter for himself and horse, and here, like a beast in its lair, he slept by day. The darkness was as light to him about the familiar plantation, and he prowled around at night unmolested.

During this second meeting he attempted little more than to argue his dusky associates out of their innate fear of spooks and to urge upon them patience in submitting to Perkins's rule a little longer. "I des tells you," he declared, "dey ain' no spooks fer us! Dere's spooks on'y fer dem w'at kills folks on de sly-like. Ef ole Perkins come rarin' en tarin' wid his gun en dawg, I des kill 'im ez I wud a rattler en he kyant bodder me no mo'; but ef I steal on

'im now en kill 'im in he sleep he ghos pester me ter daith. Dat de conslomeration ob de hull business. I doan ax you ter do anyting but he'p me skeer' im mos' ter daith. He watchin' lak a ôle fox ter ke'p you en Zany yere. Ef you puts out, he riz de kentry en put de houn's arter you. We des got ter skeer 'im off fust. I'm studyin' how ter git dat dawg out'n de way. Des go on quiet few mo' days en ef you year quar noises up on de hill whar de sogers bur'ed you know hit me. Look skeered lak de oders but doan be fear'd en keep mum."

The next few days and nights passed in quiet and all began to breathe more freely. Even Aun' Jinkey rallied under the soothing influence of her pipe and the privilege of watching part of each day with Miss Lou. Slowly the girl began to grow better. Hoping not even for tolerance of her feelings in regard to Scoville, it was her instinct to conceal them from her relatives. She knew Mrs. Waldo would not reveal what Aun' Jinkey had told her, and understood the peculiar tenderness with which that lady often kissed her. She also guessed that while the stanch Southern friend had deep sympathy for her there was not very strong regret that the affair had ended in a way to preclude further complications.

"Remember, my dear," said Mrs. Waldo, in her affectionate parting, "that God never utterly impoverishes our lives. Only we ourselves can do that. You will get well and become happy in making others happy."

On the evening of that day, even Mr. Baron's routine was completely restored. His larder was meagre compared with the past, but with the exception that Mrs. Whately occupied the place of his niece at the table, and viands were fewer, all was as it had been. Zany's fears had subsided, leaving her inwardly chafing at the prospect of monotonous and indefinite years of work under "ole miss," with little chance of Chunk's return. Aun' Suke's taste of freedom had not been to her mind, so she was rather complacent than otherwise, and especially over the fact that there was

so little to cook. The garden and Mr. Baron's good credit would insure enough plain food till the crops matured and the impoverishment caused by the raid was repaired. It certainly seemed when the sun set that evening that the present aspect of affairs might be maintained indefinitely in the little community.

Only one was not exactly at rest. Perkins felt as if something was in the air. There was a brooding, sullen quiet among the negroes which led him to suspect that they were waiting and hoping for something unknown to him. This was true of Uncle Lusthah and the majority. The crack of Union rifles was the "soun' f'um far away" they were listening for. By secret channels of communication tidings of distant battles were conveyed from plantation to plantation, and the slaves were often better informed that their masters. As for Perkins, he knew next to nothing of what was taking place, nor did he dream that he was daily addressing harsh words to conspirators against his peace.

The time had come when Chunk was ready to act. On the night in question a hot wind arose which blew from the little burial-place on the hill toward the house. "Hi! now's de charnce ter fix dat ar bizness!" and he made his preparations. Shortly before midnight he crept like a cat under the overseer's window. The heavy snoring rose and fell reassuringly, sweet as music to Chunk's ears. Not so the angry, restless growling of the savage bloodhound chained within. "But you doan kotch me dis yere time fer all yer fuss, Marse Grip," the negro muttered. "I done hab yer brekfus' ready fer yer! Dat'll settle yer hash,' and with deft hand a piece of poisoned meat was tossed close to the brute's feet as Chunk hastened away. Jute was next wakened and put on the watch. An hour later there came from the soldiers' cemetery the most doleful, unearthly sounds imaginable. No need for Jute and his confederates to arouse the other negroes in the quarters. A huddled frightened gang soon collected, Aun' Jinkey among them so scared she could not speak.

"Marse Perkins ought to know 'bout dis," cried Jute.

The suggestion was enough. The whole terror-stricken throng rushed in a body to the overseer's cottage and began calling and shrieking, "Come out yere! come out yere!" Confused in his sudden waking and thinking he was mobbed, he shouted through the window, "I'll shoot a dozen of yer ef yer don't clar out."

"Marse Perkins, des you lis'n," rose in chorus from those far beyond the fear of mortal weapons.

In the silence that followed the rushing wind bore down to them a weird, dismal howl that in Perkins's ears met every ghostly requirement. His teeth began to chatter like castanets, and snatching his jug of corn whiskey he swallowed great draughts.

"We des tink you orter know 'bout dis," said Jute.

"Cert'ny," cried Perkins in his sudden flame of false courage. "I'll light a lantern and take twenty o' you hands round that place. Ef thar's a cuss yonder makin' this 'sturbance we'll roast 'im alive."

In a moment or two he dressed and came out with a light and his gun. Two revolvers were also stuck in his belt. As he appeared on the threshold there was a prolonged yell which curdled even his inflamed blood and sent some of the negro women into hysterics.

"Come on," shouted the overseer hoarsely, "thirty of yer ef yer afraid."

The crowd fell back. "We ain' gwine ter dat ar spook place, no mattah w'at you do to us."

"Perkins, what *is* the matter?" Mr. Baron was heard shouting from the house.

"Reckon you better come out yere, sir."

"Are the hands making trouble?"

"No sir, sump'n quar's gwine on, what we kyant mek out yit."

Mr. Baron, wrapped in his dressing-gown, soon appeared on the scene, while Aun' Suke's domain contributed its quota also of agitated, half-dressed forms. Chunk could

not resist the temptation to be a witness to the scene and in a copse near by was grinning with silent laughter at his success.

After learning what had occurred, Mr. Baron scoffed at their superstitions, sternly bidding all to go to their places and keep quiet. "Perkins, you've been drinking beyond reason," he warned his overseer in a low voice. "Get back to your room quick or you will be the laughing-stock of everybody! See here, you people, you have simply got into a panic over the howling of the wind, which happens to blow down from the graveyard to-night."

"Neber yeared de win' howl dataway befo'," the negroes answered, as in a mass they drifted back to the quarters.

Perkins was not only aware of his condition but was only too glad to have so good an excuse for not searching the cemetery. Scarcely had he been left alone, however, before he followed the negroes, resolved upon companionship of even those in whom he denied a humanity like his own. In the darkness Chunk found an opportunity to summon Jute aside and say, "Free er fo' ob you offer ter stay wid ole Perkins. Thet he'p me out."

Perkins accepted the offer gladly, and they agreed to watch at his door and in the little hallway.

"You mus' des tie up dat ar dawg ob yourn," first stipulated Jute.

"Why, whar in —— is the dog? Hain't yeared a sound from 'im sence the 'sturbance begun."

"Dwags kyant stan' spooks nohow," remarked Jute.

"I've yeared that," admitted Perkins, looking around for the animal.

"Thar he is, un'er yo' baid," said Jute, peeking through the doorway.

The miserable man's hair fairly stood up when the brute was discovered stark and dead without a scratch upon him. Recourse was again had to the jug, and oblivion soon followed.

CHAPTER XXXV

A VISITATION

THERE was no more sleep at the quarters that night, and never was the dawn more welcome. It only brought a respite, however, for the impression was fixed that the place was haunted. There was a settled aspect of gloom and anxiety on every dusky face in the morning. Mr. Baron found his overseer incapacitated for duty, but the hands were rather anxious to go to work and readily obeyed his orders to do so. They clung to all that was familiar and every-day-like, while their fears and troubled consciences spurred them to tasks which they felt might be a sort of propitiation to the mysterious powers abroad. Zany was now sorry indeed that she had not gone with Chunk, and poor Aun' Jinkey so shook and trembled all day that Mrs. Whately would not let her watch by Miss Lou. Knowing much of negro superstitions she believed, with her brother and Mrs. Baron, that the graves on the place, together with some natural, yet unusual sounds, had started a panic which would soon die out.

When at last Perkins, shaky and nervous, reported the mysterious death of his dog, Mr. Baron was perplexed, but nothing more. "You were in no condition to give a sane account of anything that happened last night," he said curtly. "Be careful in the future. If you will only be sensible about it, this ridiculous scare will be to our advantage, for the hands are subdued enough now and frightened into their duty."

Perkins remained silent. In truth, he was more frightened than any one else, for the death of his dog appeared to single him out as a special object of ghostly hostility. He got through the day as well as he could, but dreaded the coming night all the more as he saw eyes directed toward him, as if he, in some way, were the cause of the supernatural visitation. This belief was due to the fact that Aun' Jinkey in her terror had spoken of Scoville's death, although she would not tell how she knew about it. "Perkins shoot at en try ter kill Marse Scoville," she had whispered to her cronies, "en now he daid he spook comin' yere ter hant de oberseer. We neber hab no quiet nights till dat ar Perkins go way fer good."

This rational explanation passed from lip to lip and was generally accepted. The coming night was looked forward to in deep apprehension, and by none more than by Perkins. Indeed, his fears so got the better of him that when the hands quit work he started for the nearest tavern and there remained till morning. Chunk was made aware of this fact, and the night passed in absolute quiet. All the negroes not in the secret now hoped that the overseer was the sole prey of the spook, and that if they remained quietly in their places they would be unmolested. Chunk and a few of the boldest of his fellow conspirators had full scope therefore to perfect their final arrangements. In a disused room of one of the outbuildings the most ragged and blood-stained uniforms of the Union soldiers had been cast and forgotten. These were carried to a point near the burying-ground, tried on and concealed. Chunk found it was no easy task to keep even the reckless fellows he had picked up to the sticking point of courage in the grewsome tasks he had in view, but his scoff, together with their mutual aid and comfort, carried them through, while the hope of speedy freedom inspired them to what was felt to be great risks.

On this occasion he dismissed them some little time before midnight, for he wished them to get rested and in good

condition for what he hoped would be the final effort the following night. As he lingered in the still, starlit darkness he could not resist making an effort to see Zany, and so began hooting like an owl down by the run, gradually approaching nearer till he reached the garden. Zany, wakeful and shivering with nameless dread, was startled by the sound. Listening intently, she soon believed she detected a note that was Chunk's and not a bird's. Her first impression was that her lover had discovered that he could not go finally away without her and so had returned. Her fear of spooks was so great that her impulse was to run away with Chunk as far from that haunted plantation as he would take her. Trembling like a wind-shaken leaf, she stole into the garden shrubbery and whispered, "Chunk?"

"Hi! yere I is."

There was no tantalizing coquetry in Zany's manner now. In a moment she was in Chunk's arms sobbing, "Tek me way off fum dis place. I go wid you now, dis berry minute, en I neber breve easy till we way, way off enywhar, I doan keer whar. Oh, Chunk, you doan know w'at been gwine on en I darsn't tell you twel we gits way off."

"I isn't feared," replied Chunk easily.

"Dat's kaze you doan know. I des been tremblin' stiddy sence las' night en I'se feared hit begin eny minute now."

"Hit woan begin dis yere night," replied Chunk, soothingly and incautiously.

"How you know?" she asked quickly, a sudden suspicion entering her mind.

"W'at's ter begin?" answered Chunk, now on his guard. "De night am still, nobody roun'. I hang roun' a few nights twel I study out de bes' plan ter git away."

"Has you been hangin' roun' nights, Chunk?" Zany asked solemnly.

"How you talks, Zany! Does you s'pects I dar stay roun' whar Perkins am? He kill me. He done gone way to-night."

"How you know dat?"

"One de fiel'-hans tole me."

"Chunk, ef you up ter shines en doan tole me I done wid you. Hasn't I hep you out'n in eberyting so fur? Ef I fin' out you been skeerin me so wid eny doin's I des done wid you. I des feel hit in my bones you de spook. You kyant bamboozle me. I kin hep you—hab done hit afo'—en I kin hinder you, so be keerful. Dere's some dif'unce in bein' a spook yosef en bein' skeered ter death by a rale spook. Ef you tryin' ter skeer en fool me I be wuss on you ner eny Voodoo woman dat eber kunjurd folks."

The interview ended in Chunk's making a clean breast of it and in securing Zany as an ally with mental reservations. The thought that he had fooled her rankled.

Mr. Baron's expostulation and his own pressing interests induced Perkins to remain at home the following night. As Jute had seemed forgiving and friendly, the overseer asked him to bring two others and stay with him, offering some of the contents of the replenished jug as a reward. They sat respectfully near the door while Perkins threw himself on his bed with the intention of getting to sleep as soon as possible. "Are you shore ther wuz no 'sturbances last night?" he asked.

"Well, Marse Perkins," replied Jute, "you didn't s'pect we out lookin'. We wuz po'ful sleepy en roll we haids en er blankets en den 'fo' we knowed, hit sun-up. Folks say en de quarters dat ar spook ain' arter us."

"Who the devil is hit arter then?" was the angry response.

"How we know, mars'r? We neber try ter kill enybody."

"But I tell you I didn't kill him," expostulated their nervous victim.

"Didn't name no names, Marse Perkins. I on'y knows w'at I yeared folks tell 'bout spooks. Dey's mighty cur'us, spooks is. Dey des 'pear to git a spite agin some folks en dey ain' bodderin oder folks long ez dey ain' 'feered wid. I 'spect a spook dat wuz 'feered wid, get he dander up en

slam roun' permiscus. I des tek a ole bull by de horns 'fo' I 'fere wid a spook," and Jute's companions grunted assent.

"W'at's the good o' yer bein' yere then?" Perkins asked, taking a deep draught.

"Well, now, Marse Perkins, you mus'n be onreasonbul. W'at cud we do? We des riskin' de wool on we haids stayin' yere fer comp'ny. Ef de spook come, 'spose he tink we no business yere en des lay we out lak he kunjer yo' dawg? We des tank you, Marse Perkins, fer anoder lil drap ter kep we sperets out'n we shoon," and Jute shuddered portentously.

"Well," said Perkins, with attempted bravado, "I rammed a piece o' silver down on the bullat in my gun. 'Twix 'em both—"

"Dar now, Marse Perkins, you des been 'posed on 'bout dat silber business. Ole Unc' Sampson w'at libed on de Simcoe place nigh on er hun'erd yeahs, dey say, tole me lots 'bout a spook dat boddered um w'en he a boy. Way back ole Marse Simcoe shot at de man dat hanker fer he darter. De man put out en get drownded, but dat doan make no dif'rence, Unc' Sampson say, kaze ole Marse Simcoe do he bes' ter kill der man. He sorter hab kill in he heart en Unc' Sampson low a spook know w'at gwine on in er man's in'erds, en dey des goes fer de man dat wanter kill um on de sly, en not dose dat kill in fa'r fight. Ole Unc' Sampson po'ful on spooks. He libed so long he get ter be sorter spook hesef, en dey say he talk ter um haf de time 'fo' he kiner des snuf out'n lak a can'l."

"He wuz a silly old fool," growled Perkins, with a perceptible tremor in his voice.

"Spect he wuz 'bout some tings," resumed Jute, "but know spooks, he sut'ny did. He say ole Marse Simcoe useter plug lead en silver right froo dat man dat want he darter, en dar was de hole en de light shin'in' froo hit. But de spook ain' min'in' a lil ting lak dat, he des come on all de same snoopin' roun' arter de ole man's darter. Den one mawnin' de ole man lay stiff en daid in he baid, he eyes

starin' open ez ef he see sump'n he cudn't stan' no how. Dat wuz de las' ob dat ar spook, Unc' Sampson say, en he say spook's cur'us dat away. W'en dey sats'fy dere grudge dey lets up en dey doan foller de man dey down on kaze dey on'y po'r in de place whar de man 'lowed ter kill um."

Perkins took a mental note of this very important limitation of ghostly persecution, and resolved that if he had any more trouble all the crops in the State would not keep him within the haunted limit.

He whiled away the time by aid of his jug and Job-like comforters till it began to grow late and he drowsy.

Suddenly Jute exclaimed, "Hi! Marse Perkins, w'at dat light dancin' up yon'er by de grabeyard?"

The overseer rose with a start, his hair rising also as he saw a fitful jack-o'-lantern gleam, appearing and disappearing on the cemetery hill. As had been expected, he obeyed his impulse, pouring down whiskey until he speedily rendered himself utterly helpless; but while his intoxication disabled him physically, it produced for a time an excited and disordered condition of mind in which he was easily imposed upon. Jute shook him and adjured him to get up, saying, "I years quar soun's comin' dis way."

When satisfied that their victim could make no resistance, Jute and companions pretended to start away in terror. Perkins tried to implore them to remain, but his lips seemed paralyzed. A few moments later a strange group entered the cottage—five figures dressed in Federal uniforms, hands and faces white and ghastly, and two carrying white cavalry sabres. Each one had its finger on its lips, but Perkins was beyond speech. In unspeakable horror he stared vacantly before him and remained silent and motionless. The ghostly shapes looked at him fixedly for a brief time, then at one another, and solemnly nodded. Next, four took him up and bore him out, the fifth following with the jug. At the door stood an immovably tall form, surmounted by a cavalry hat and wrapped in a long army overcoat.

"Leftenan' Scoville!" gasped Perkins.

The figure, as if the joints of its back were near the ground, made a portentous inclination of assent and then pointed with another white sabre to the hill, leading the way. Perkins tried to shout for help, but his tongue seemed powerless, as in fact it was, from terror and liquor combined. He felt himself carried swiftly and, as he thought, surely, to some terrible doom.

At last his bearers stopped, and Perkins saw the mounds of the Union dead rising near. He now remembered in a confused way that one more grave had been dug than had proved necessary, and he uttered a low howl as he felt himself lowered into it. Instantly the tall figure which appeared to direct everything theatened him with a ghostly sabre, and an utter paralysis of unspeakable dread fell upon him.

For a few moments they all stood around and pointed at him with ghostly white fingers, then gradually receded until out of sight. After a time Perkins began to get his voice, when suddenly his tormentors appeared in terrible guise. Each white, ghostly face was lighted up as by a tongue of fire; terrible eyes gleamed from under wide-crowned cavalry hats and a voice was heard, in a sepulchral whisper, "Nex' time we come fer you, we bury you!"

At this instant came a flash of lightning, followed by a tremendous clap of thunder. The jaws of the figures dropped, the burning splinters of light-wood they carried dropping down into the grave, and on its half-lifeless occupant. The ghosts now disappeared finally—in fact took to their heels; all except Chunk, who secured the jug, nodded thrice portentously at Perkins and then retired also, not a little shaken in his nerves, but sufficiently self-controlled to rally his panic-stricken followers and get them to remove their disguises before wrapping their heads in blankets. Having removed and hidden all traces of the escapade he hooted for the alert Zany, who had been tremblingly on the watch in spite of her knowledge of what was going on. As

she fled with Chunk before the coming storm she gasped between the gusts, "I declar, Chunk, sech doin's gwine ter brung a judgment."

Even Chunk inclined to this view for a time, as the lightning blazed from sky to earth, and the thunder cracked and roared overhead. The rain poured in such torrents that he feared Perkins might be drowned in the grave where he had been placed. As for Aun' Jinkey, she stared at her unexpected visitors in speechless perplexity and terror until the fury of the tempest had passed and their voices could be heard.

CHAPTER XXXVI

UNCLE LUSTHAH EXHORTS

THE heavy thunder shower which came and passed quickly, combined with a consciousness of their high-handed performances, so awed Chunk and Zany and oppressed them with misgivings that they were extremely reticent, even to Aun' Jinkey. Chunk appeared profoundly ignorant of the ghostly disturbances, trying to say unconcernedly, "I foun' hit a orful long en skeery trable ter de Un'on lines en I says ter mysef, 'De Yanks fin' me down yere quicker ner I fin' dem up Norf. Dey be comin' dis away agin sho'."

"I des tells you we all git whip nigh ter daith ef you ain' mo' keerful," said Aun' Jinkey, solemnly. "I kyant stan' de goin's on. I gwine ter pieces ev'y day en nights git'n wusser'n de days. De gust ober en you bettah light out. Ef Zany missed dey come yere lookin' fer her."

They needed no urging to depart, for Zany was now as scared as Chunk had ever wished her to be, but her terrors were taking a form which inclined her to cling to the old landmarks rather than risk she knew not what, in running away. As she and Chunk were stealing toward the kitchen a flash of lightning from the retiring storm revealed a startling figure—that of Perkins, drenched and bedraggled, his eyes almost starting from their sockets as he staggered toward his cottage. Chunk's courage at last gave way; he turned and fled, leaving Zany in the lurch. Frightened almost to the point of hysterics, she crept to her bed and shook till morning, resolving meanwhile to have done with

Chunk and all his doings. The next day Mrs. Baron found her the most diligent and faithful of servants.

Perkins reached his door and looked into the dark entrance, the gusts having blown out the light. He shook his head, muttered something unintelligible, and then bent his uncertain steps to the tavern. The next morning Mr. Baron suspected where he was and went to see him. The overseer was found to be a pitiable spectacle, haggard trembling, nervous in the extreme, yet sullen and reticent and resolute in his purpose never to set foot on the plantation again. Mr. Baron then closed all business relations and sent over the man's belongings. Perkins became a perplexing problem to Mr. Baron and his household and a terrible tradition to the negroes, who regarded him as a haunted man. Every day and night passed in quietness after his departure enabled them to breathe more freely and to become more assured that he "wuz de on'y one de spooks arter."

Chunk felt that he had disgraced himself by running away and leaving Zany, and did not venture back till the second night after the culmination of his schemes. He found Jute and his associates scared, sullen and inclined to have little to do with him in their present mood. Then he hooted in vain for Zany. The girl heard him but made no sign, muttering, "Sence you runned away en lef' me I'se done wid runnin' away. You tootin' lak a squinch-owl en kin kep comp'ny wid squinch-owls."

Only Aun' Jinkey gave him food and a sort of fearful welcome, and poor Chunk found himself at last a very unhappy and skulking outlaw.

Mr. Baron gradually rallied under his increased responsibilities and resolved to be his own overseer. Although an exacting master, the negroes knew he was not a severe one if they did their work fairly well. The spook scare had given Uncle Lusthah renewed influence and he used it in behalf of peace and order. "Our fren Miss Lou, sick," he urged. "We mek her trouble en we mek oursefs trouble ef we doan go on peac'ble. What kin we do eny way at

dis yer time? De Norf fightin' fer us en hit all 'pen' on de Norf. We mus' kep a gwine ez we is till de times en seasons ob de Lawd is 'vealed."

And so for a period, quiet again settled down on the old plantation. Mrs. Whately and Aun' Jinkey nursed Miss Lou into a slow, languid convalescence, till at last she was able to sit in an easy-chair on the piazza. This she would do by the hour, with a sad, apathetic look on her thin face. She was greatly changed, her old rounded outlines had shrunken and she looked frail enough for the winds to blow away. The old, fearless, spirited look in her blue eyes had departed utterly, leaving only an expression of settled sadness, varied by an anxious, expectant gaze, suggesting a lingering hope that some one might come or something happen to break the dreadful silence which began, she felt, when Scoville fell from his horse in the darkening forest. It remained unbroken, and her heart sank into more hopeless despondency daily. Aun' Jinkey and Zany were charged so sternly to say nothing to disturb the mind of their young mistress that they obeyed. She was merely given the impression that Perkins had gone away of his own will, and this was a relief. She supposed Chunk had returned to his Union friends, and this also became the generally accepted view of all except Aun' Jinkey.

Mrs. Whately came to spend part of the time at The Oaks and part on her own plantation, where her presence was needed. Her devotion would have won Miss Lou's whole heart but for the girl's ever-present consciousness of Mad Whately in the background. The mother now had the tact to say nothing about him except in a natural and general way, occasionally trying the experiment of reading extracts from his brief letters, made up, as they were, chiefly of ardent messages to his cousin. These Miss Lou received in silence and unfeigned apathy.

The respite and quiet could not last very long in these culminating months of the war. Without much warning even to the negroes, who appeared to have a sort of tele-

graphic communication throughout the region, a Union column forced its way down the distant railroad and made it a temporary line of communication. Mr. Baron suddenly woke up to the fact that the nearest town was occupied by the Federals and that his human property was in a ferment. A foraging party soon appeared in the neighborhood and even visited him, but his statement of what he had suffered and the evident impoverishment of the place led the Union officer to seek more inviting fields.

Partly to satisfy her own mind as well as that of her niece, Mrs. Whately asked after Scoville, but could obtain no information. The troops in the vicinity were of a different organization, the leader of the party a curt, grizzled veteran, bent only on obtaining supplies. Miss Lou, sitting helplessly in her room, felt instinctively that she did not wish even to speak to him.

Tō Chunk, this Union advance was a godsend. He immediately took his horse to the railroad town, sold it for a small sum, and found employment at the station, where his great strength secured him good wages. He could handle with ease a barrel akin to himself in shape and size.

Uncle Lusthah suddenly found immense responsibility thrust upon him. In the opinion of the slaves the time and seasons he had predicted and asked his flock to wait for had come. Negroes from other and nearer plantations were thronging to the town, and those at The Oaks were rapidly forming the purpose to do likewise. They only waited the sanction of their religious teacher to go almost in a body. The old preacher was satisfied they would soon go any way, unless inducements and virtual freedom were offered. He therefore sought Mr. Baron and stated the case to him.

The old planter would listen to nothing. He was too honorable to temporize and make false promises. "Bah!" he said, irritably, "the Yanks will soon be driven off as they were before. I can't say you are free! I can't give you a share in the crops! It's contrary to the law of the State and the whole proper order of things. I wouldn't do

it if I could. What would my neighbors think? What would I think of myself? What a fine condition I'd be in after the Yanks are all driven from the country! No, I shall stand or fall with the South and maintain the institutions of my fathers. If you people leave me now and let the crops go to waste you will soon find yourselves starving. When you come whining back I'll have nothing to feed you with."

Uncle Lusthah cast an imploring look on Miss Lou where she sat in her chair, with more interest expressed in her wan face than she had shown for a long time.

"Uncle Lusthah," she said earnestly, "don't you leave me. As soon as I am able I'll buy you of uncle and set you free. Then you can always work for me."

"I doan wanter lebe you, young mistis, I sut'ny doan, ner der ole place whar I al'ays libed. But freedom sweet, young mistis, en I wanter feel I free befo' I die."

"You shall, Uncle Lusthah. You have earned *your* freedom, anyway."

"Tut, tut, Louise, that's no way to talk," said her uncle testily.

The old slave looked from one to the other sorrowfully, shook his head and slowly retired.

"Remember what I said," Miss Lou called after him, and then sank back in her chair.

Uncle Lusthah had to relate the result of his conference, and the consequence was an immediate outbreak of a reckless, alienated spirit. That afternoon the field hands paid no attention to Mr. Baron's orders, and he saw that slaves from other plantations were present. Uncle Lusthah sat at his door with his head bowed on his breast. His people would listen to him no more, and he himself was so divided in his feelings that he knew not what to say.

"Hit may be de Lawd's doin's ter set He people free," he muttered, "but somehow I kyant brung mysef ter lebe dat po' sick chile. Ole mars'r en ole miss kyant see en woan see, en dat lil chile w'at stan' up fer us in de 'stremity

ob triberlation be lef' wid no one ter do fer her. I berry ole en stiff in my jints en I cud die peaceful ef I know I free; but hit 'pears that de Lawd say ter me, 'Uncle Lusthah, stay right yere en look arter dat lil sick lam'. Den I mek you free w'en de right time come.' ''

Uncle Lusthah soon had the peace of the martyr who has chosen his course. Mr. Baron also sat on his veranda with head bowed upon his breast. He too had chosen his course, and now in consequence was sunk in more bitter and morose protest than ever. Events were beyond his control and he knew it, but he would neither yield nor change. This was the worst that had yet befallen him. Black ruin stared him in the face, and he stared back with gloomy yet resolute eyes. "I will go down with my old colors flying," he resolved, and that was the end of it.

His wife was with him in sympathy, but her indomitable spirit would not be crushed. She was almost ubiquitous among the house and yard slaves, awing them into a submission which they scarcely understood and inwardly chafed at. She even went to the quarters and produced evident uneasiness by her stern, cutting words. None dared reply to her, but when the spell of her presence was removed all resumed their confused and exultant deliberations as to their future course.

Aun' Jinkey, sitting with Miss Lou, scoffed at the idea of going away. "Long ez my chimly-corner en my pipe dar I dar too," she said. "Dis freedom business so mux up I kyant smoke hit out nohow."

Zany was in a terribly divided state of mind. Were it not for Miss Lou, she would have been ready enough to go, especially as she had heard that Chunk was at the railroad town. Her restless spirit craved excitement and freedom: a townful of admirers, with Chunk thrown in, was an exceedingly alluring prospect. With all her faults, she had a heart, and the sick girl had won her affection unstintedly. When therefore Miss Lou summoned her and fixed her sad, pleading blue eyes upon her, the girl threw her apron over

her head and began to cry. "Doan say a word, Miss Lou," she sobbed, "doan ax me not ter go kase ef you does I kyant go."

"Sech foolishness!" ejaculated Aun' Jinkey with a disdainful sniff. "She lebe you des lak a cat dat snoop off enywhar en arter enybody w'at got mo' vittles. W'at she keer?"

Down came the apron, revealing black eyes blazing through the tears which were dashed right and left as Zany cried, "You ole himage, w'at you keer? You tink a hun'erd times mo' ob yer pipe ner Miss Lou. Long ez you kin smoke en projeck in dat ar ole cabin hole you woan lebe his 'less you turned out. I des gwine ter stay out'n spite en doan wanter go a hun'erd mile ob dat gran'boy ob yourn."

"There, Zany," said Miss Lou gently, holding out her hand. "I understand you and Aun' Jinkey both, and you both are going to stay out of love for me. I reckon you won't be sorry in the end."

Up went the apron again and Zany admitted, "I kyant lebe you, Miss Lou, I des kyant," as she rushed away to indulge in the feminine relief of tears without stint.

Mr. and Mrs. Baron passed a sleepless night, for even the question of food would be problematical if all the able-bodied men and women on the place went away. In the early dawn there were ominous sounds at the quarters, and as the light increased a spectacle which filled the old planter and his wife with rage was revealed. The quarters were empty and all were trooping toward the avenue with bundles containing their belongings. This was to be expected, but the act which excited the direst indignation was the hitching of the only pair of mules left on the place that were worth anything to the old family carriage. Aun' Suke was waddling toward this with the feeling that a "char'ot wuz waitin' fer her now, sho!"

Mr. and Mrs. Baron looked at each other in quick, comprehensive sympathy, then hastily and partially dressed.

Mr. Baron took his revolver while "ole miss" snatched a sharp carving-knife from the dining-room. By the time they reached the scene, Aun' Suke filled the back seat of the carriage and the rest of the space was being filled with babies.

"Stop that!" shouted Mr. Baron. "Before I'll let you take my mules I'll shoot 'em both."

"Ole miss" wasted no time in threats—she simply cut the traces and there were Aun' Suke and the babies stranded. The negroes drew together on one side and master and mistress on the other. The faces of the latter were aglow with anger; on the countenances of the former were mingled perplexity and sullen defiance, but the old habit of deference still had its restraining influence.

"Go and starve and leave us to starve, if you will," shouted Mr. Baron, "but you shall steal none of my property."

Angry mutterings began among the negroes, and it were hard to say how the scene would have ended if old Uncle Lusthah had not suddenly appeared between the opposing parties, and held up his hand impressively.

"I gib up my charnce ter be free," he began with simple dignity. "My body 'longs ter you yit, mars'r en misus; but not my speret. Out'n dat I gwine ter speak plain fer de fear ob man clean gone fum me. Mars'r, w'at I say ter you? Lak ole Pharo, you t'ink yo'sef bigger'n de Lawd. Ef you'd done spoke ter de hans en say 'des go home en dar de crops en shar' togeder' dey ud stayed en wucked fer you 'tented like, but you des talk lak ole Pharo. Now de people gwine en you kyant stop dem. We knowed 'bout de prokermation ob de gre't Linkum. We know we bin free dis long time. We al'ays know you no right ter keep us slabes. Dis yer God's worl'. Hit don't 'long ter you en misus. He ain't stoppin' ter 'sult you 'bout He doin's. Ef you s'mitted ter He will you'd a gwine 'long easy lak de crops grow in spring-time. Now hit des de same ez ef you plant de crops in de fall en 'spect de Lawd ter turn de winter

inter summer ter please you. I berry ole en had 'spearance. I'se prayed all de long night en de Lawd's gib me ter see inter de futer. Lak Moses I may never git in de promised lan' ob freedom, but hit dar en you kyant kep de people out'n hit. Ef you doan bend ter He will, you breaks. W'en all de han's gone en de fiel's is waste t'ink ober de trufe. De Lawd did'n mek dis yer worl' ter suit you en misus. P'raps He t'ink ez much ob dem po' souls dar (pointing at the negroes) ez ob yourn. Didn't I stan' wid dem w'at die ter mek us free? Der blood wateh dis hull lan' en I feels hit in my heart dat de Lawd'll brung up a crap dis lan' neber saw befo'. Please reckermember, mars'r en misus, de gre't wuck ob de Lawd gwine right along des ez ef you ain' dar."

Then the old man turned to the negroes and in his loud, melodious voice concluded, "I gibs you one mo' 'zortation. You *is* free, but ez I say so of'un you ain' free ter do foolishness. Tek yo' wibes en chil'un; dey yourn. Tek yo' clo'es; you arned um en much mo', but you kyant tek de mules en de ker'age: dey mars'r's. Go en wuck lak men en wimmin fer hon'st wages en show you fit ter be free. Reckermember all I tole you so of'un. De Lawd go wid you en kep you in de way ob life everlas'in'."

The better element among the negroes prevailed, for they felt that they had had a spokesman who voiced their best and deepest feelings. One after another came and wrung the hand of the old man and departed. To "Pharo" and his wife few vouchsafed a glance, for they had cut the cord of human sympathy. Many messages of affection, however, were left for Miss Lou. The mothers took the babies from the carriage, Aun' Suke was helped out and she sulkily waddled down the avenue with the rest. By the time she reached the main road her powers of locomotion gave out, causing her to drop, half-hysterical, by the wayside. Some counselled her to go back, saying they would come for her before long; but pride, shame and exhaustion made it almost as difficult to go back as to go forward, and so she was

left lamenting. With stern, inflexible faces, master and mistress watched their property depart, then returned to the house, while Uncle Lusthah mended the harness temporarily and took the carriage back to its place. Standing aloof, Zany had watched the scene, wavering between her intense desire to go and her loyalty to Miss Lou. The sick girl had conquered, the negress winning an heroic victory over herself. When she entered the back door of the mansion, her face rigid from the struggle she had passed through, she was in no lamb-like mood. Neither was her mistress, who was angrier than she had ever been in her life.

"Well," she said to Zany in cold, cutting tones, "what are you doing here? Looking around for something to carry off before you go also?"

Stung to the quick by this implied charge and lack of appreciation of her great self-sacrifice, Zany replied hotly, "I done wid you, misus. I tek no mo' orders fum you. I stay fer sump'n you doan know not'n 'bout—lub, but lub fer Miss Lou. Ef she kyant 'tect em 'gin you den I go."

CHAPTER XXXVII

A NEW ROUTINE

IT certainly was a dismal, shrunken household that Mrs. Baron presided over that morning. Aun' Jinkey came to the rescue and prepared a meagre breakfast. Miss Lou's room being on the side of the house furthest from the scenes of the early morning, she had slept on till Zany wakened her. She listened in a sort of dreary apathy to all that had occurred, feeling that she was too weak physically and too broken-spirited to interfere. She also had the impression that it would have been of no use—that her uncle and aunt were so fixed in their ways and views that nothing but harsh experience could teach them anything. In answer to Zany's appeal for protection against "ole miss" Miss Lou said, "We won't say anything more about it now till you get over your hurt feelings, which are very natural. Of course my aunt can't punish you—that's out of the question now, but by and by I reckon you will do for her out of love for me when you see it will save me trouble. You have done a good, unselfish act in staying with me, and having begun so well, you will keep on in the same way. After all of the rest get free you will, too. What's more, when I come into my property I'll make free all who stand by me now."

So Zany brought her up a nice little breakfast and was comforted.

When at last the young girl with weak, uncertain steps came down to her easy-chair on the piazza, she found her

uncle gloomily smoking, and her aunt solacing her perturbed mind with her chief resource—housekeeping affairs. Little was said beyond a formal greeting.

As Miss Lou sat gazing vacantly and sadly down the avenue, a huge figure appeared, making slow, painful progress toward the house. At last Aun' Suke was recognized, and the truth flashed across the girl's mind that the fat old cook had found she could not get away. Finally the woman sat down under a tree not far from the house, not only overcome by heat and fatigue, but also under the impression that she must open negotiations before she could expect to be received.

"There," said Mr. Baron grimly, "is one of them coming back already. They'll be sneaking, whining back when the crops are spoiled and it's too late."

Miss Lou rose feebly and got an old sunshade from the hall.

"Louise, you are not able—I forbid it."

The girl felt she had strength to get to the old woman but not enough to contend with her uncle, so she went slowly down the steps without a word. Mr. Baron growled, "I might as well speak to the wind as to anybody on the place any more."

When Aun' Suke saw the girl coming to her she scrambled to her feet, and holding up her hands ejaculated all sorts of remorseful and deprecatory comments.

"Welcome back," said Miss Lou kindly, when in speaking distance. "There, don't go on so. Sit down and I'll sit down with you." She sank at the foot of the tree and leaned against it, panting.

"I des feels ez ef de yeth ud op'n en swaller me," began the poor renegade, quivering with emotion.

"Don't talk so, Aun' Suke. I'm not strong enough to stand foolishness. You will go back with me and stay with Uncle Lusthah and Aun' Jinkey and Zany. You will cook for us all just the same and by and by you will be as free as I am."

"Well, Miss Lou, I comin' back lak de perdigous son, but ole miss ain' got no fatted calf fer me, ner you neider, I reckon. I des feered on w'at ole miss say en do."

"Aun' Suke," said the girl, taking the woman's great black hand, "you stand by me and I'll stand by you. When I get stronger we'll see what's best to be done. Now I can't think, I don't know. I only feel that we must help one another till all is clearer."

Mrs. Baron accepted Aun' Suke's presence in the kitchen again in grim silence. She believed it the earnest of the speedy return of all the others, and resolved to bide her time when the Southern armies restored completely the old order of things.

Mrs. Whately drove over during the day and was aghast at what had occurred.

"I have kept the great majority of my hands by conciliation and promising them a share in the crops. Indeed, I had virtually to treat them as if free. It was either that or ruin."

"Well," growled her brother, "you can't keep that pace and I wouldn't begin it."

"I can only do the best I can, from day to day," sighed the lady, "and I've been almost distracted."

After showing her affectionate solicitude for Miss Lou she returned, feeling that her presence at home was now hourly needed.

Gradually the little household began to adjust itself to the new order of things, and day by day Mr. and Mrs. Baron were compelled to see that the few servants who ministered to them were kept at their tasks by an influence in which they had no part. Almost imperceptibly, Miss Lou regained her strength, yet was but the shadow of her former self. Uncle Lusthah gave his attention to the garden, already getting weed-choked. The best he could hope to do was to keep up a meagre supply of vegetables, and Zany in the cool of the day often gave him a helping hand.

Late one afternoon Miss Lou, feeling a little stronger,

went to Aun' Jinkey's cabin and sat down on the door-step.

"Oh, mammy," she sighed, "I'm so tired, I'm so tired; yet I can do nothing at all."

"You po' lil chile," groaned Aun' Jinkey, "how dif'ernt you looks ner w'en you fus sot dar en wish sump'n happen."

"Oh," cried the girl almost despairingly, "too much has happened! too much has happened! How can God let such troubles come upon us?"

"Eben Uncle Lusthah hab ter say he dunno. He say he des gwine ter hole on twel de eend, en dat all he kin do."

"Oh, mammy, I'm all at sea. I haven't any strength to hold on and there doesn't seem anything to hold on to. Oh, mammy, mammy, do you think he's surely dead?"

"I feared he is," groaned Aun' Jinkey. "Dey say he spook come arter Perkins en dat w'y de oberseer clared out."

"Oh, horrible!" cried the girl. "If his spirit could come here at all would it not come to me instead of to that brutal wretch? Oh, mammy, I don't know which is worse, your religion or your superstition. You believe in a God who lets such things happen and you can think my noble friend would come back here only to scare a man like Perkins. It's all just horrible. Oh, Allan, Allan, are you so lost to me that you can never look goodwill into my eyes again?"

Tears rushed to her eyes for the first time since she heard the dreadful tidings, and she sobbed in her mammy's arms till exhausted.

That outburst of grief and the relief of tears given by kindly nature was the decisive point in Miss Lou's convalescence. She was almost carried back to her room and slept till late the following day. When she awoke she felt that her strength was returning, and with it came the courage to take up the burdens of life. For weeks it was little more than the courage of a naturally brave, conscientious nature which will not yield to the cowardice and weakness of inaction. The value of work, of constant occupation, to sustain and divert the mind, was speedily learned. Gradually she

took the helm of outdoor matters from her uncle's nerveless hands. She had a good deal of a battle in respect to Chunk. It was a sham one on the part of Zany, as the girl well knew, for Chunk's "tootin'" was missed terribly. Mr. and Mrs. Baron at first refused point-blank to hear of his returning.

"Uncle," said his ward gravely, "is only your property at stake? I can manage Chunk, and through him perhaps get others. I am not responsible for changes which I can't help; I am to blame if I sit down idly and helplessly and do nothing better than fret or sulk. Your bitter words of protest are not bread and bring no money. For your sakes as well as my own you must either act or let me act."

The honorable old planter was touched at his most sensitive point, and reluctantly conceded, saying, "Oh, well, if you think you can save any of your property out of the wreck, employ Chunk on your own responsibility."

So Chunk was reinstated in his granny's cabin and given a share in all he could raise and secure of the crops. The negro was as shrewd as Jacob of old, but like the Hebrew patriarch could do much under the inspiration of his twofold affection for Zany and his young mistress.

And so the summer and early fall wore away. The railroad line of communication was maintained, and upon it drifted away Mr. Baron's former slaves and the great majority of the others in the neighborhood. The region in which the plantation was situated was so remote and sparsely settled that it was a sort of border land, unclaimed and unvisited by any considerable bodies from either party. Rev. Dr. Williams' congregation had shrunken to a handful. He officiated at one end of the church, and his plump, black-eyed daughter led the singing at the other, but it was observed that she looked discontented rather than devotional. She was keenly alive to the fact that there was not an eligible man left in the parish. Uncle Lusthah patiently drove the mules every clear Sunday morning and Mr. and Mrs. Baron sat in the carriage whose springs Aun' Suke had sorely tried; but Miss Lou would not go with

them. After his readiness to marry her to her cousin she felt it would be worse than mockery to listen to Dr. Williams again.

But a deep, yet morbid spiritual change was taking place in the girl. As of old, she thought and brooded when her hands were busy, and during her long, solitary evenings on the piazza. Strange to say, she was drawing much of her inspiration from a grave—the grave of a rough, profane soldier whom she knew only as "Yarry." There was something in his self-forgetful effort in her behalf, even when in the mortal anguish of death, which appealed to her most powerfully. His heroism, expecting, hoping for no reward, became the finest thing in her estimation she had ever witnessed. Her own love taught her why Scoville was attracted by her and became ready to do anything for her. "That's the old, old story," she mused, "ever sweet and new, yet old as the world. Poor Yarry was actuated by a purely unselfish, noble impulse. Only such an impulse can sustain and carry me through my life. No, no, Mrs. Waldo, I can never become happy in making others happy. I can never be happy again. The bullet which killed Allan Scoville pierced my heart also and it is dead, but that poor soldier taught me how one can still live and suffer nobly, and such a life must be pleasing to the only God I can worship."

All wondered at the change gradually taking place in the girl. It was too resolute, too much the offspring of her will rather than her heart to have in it much gentleness, but it was observed that she was becoming gravely and patiently considerate of others, even of their faults and follies. As far as possible, her uncle and aunt were allowed their own way without protest, the girl sacrificing her own feelings and wishes when it was possible. They at last began to admit that their niece was manifesting a becoming spirit of submission and deference, when in fact her management of their affairs was saving them from an impoverishment scarcely to be endured.

For Mrs. Whately the girl now had a genuine and strong affection, chilled only by her belief that the plan in regard to the son was ever in the mother's mind. So indeed it was. The sagacious woman watched Miss Lou closely and with feelings of growing hope as well as of tenderness. The girl was showing a patience, a strength of mind, and, above all, a spirit of self-sacrifice which satisfied Mrs. Whately that she was the one of all the world for her son.

"I do believe," she thought, "that if I can only make Louise think it will be best for us all as well as Madison, she will yield. The spirit of self-sacrifice seems her supreme impulse. Her sadness will pass away in time, and she would soon learn to love the father of her children. What's more, there is something about her now which would hold any man's love. See how her lightest wish controls those who work for her, even that harum-scarum Zany."

In the late autumn a long-delayed letter threw Mrs. Whately into a panic of fear and anxiety. A surgeon wrote that her son had been severely wounded and had lost his left arm, but that he was doing well.

HERE the author laid down his pen. In Mr. Roe's journal, under date of July 11, is an entry alluding to a conversation with a friend. That conversation concerned the conclusion of this book, and was, in effect, substantially the same as the outline given by him in a letter, part of which is quoted as follows:

"It is not my purpose to dwell further on incidents connected with the close of the war, as the book may be considered too long already. It only remains for me now to get all my people happy as soon as possible. Zany and Chunk 'make up,' and a good deal of their characteristic love-making will be worked in to relieve the rather sombre state of things at this stage. Whately returns with his empty sleeve, more

of a hero than ever in his own eyes and his mother's. Miss Lou thinks him strangely thoughtful and considerate in keeping away, as he does, after a few short visits at The Oaks. The truth is, he is wofully disappointed at the change in his cousin's looks. This pale, listless, hollow-eyed girl is not the one who set him to reading 'Taming of the Shrew.' That her beauty of color and of outline could ever return, he does not consider; and in swift revulsion of feeling secretly pays court elsewhere.

"Mrs. Whately, however, makes up for her son's deficiencies. Utterly ignorant how affairs are shaping, she works by her representations upon Miss Lou's sympathies until the weary consent is wrung from the poor girl—'Nothing matters to me any more! If it makes you all happy—why—then— But I must wait a year.' She feels that her love for Allan Scoville will never be less, and that this period of time is little enough to devote to him in silent memory.

"The delighted aunt hastens to report to her son, who stares rather blankly, for a lover, as he hears of this concession on his cousin's part, and without answer, he orders his horse and rides furiously away. The ride is one that has been very frequently taken since the young man's return, and pretty soon he is in earnest conversation with the rosy-cheeked, black-eyed daughter of Dr. Williams. There seems to be very good understanding between the two, and later, just at the final scene, it will come out as effectively as can be portrayed the startling news of their secret marriage.

"The days go on. One afternoon in the late autumn, Aun' Jinkey, smoking and 'projeckin' ' as usual in her cabin, has a vision which fairly sends her heart, as she will express it, 'right troo de mouf.' Was it a 'spook,' or had the dead really come back to life? And I hear her exclaim, throwing up her hands, 'Bress de Lawd, Marse Scoville, dat you? Whar you drap fum dis yere time? I doan almos' know you widout de un'fo'm!'

"But the 'vision' will not stop to narrate to the old aunty

of his capture, imprisonment and illness, his release and hurried journey North. He catches sight of the slight figure of Miss Lou in the distance near the run, and in a moment is beside her. 'Only death could keep me from seeking you and living for you always, did I not tell you, my darling, my darling?'

"And here I will leave them. The reader's imagination will picture more if more is wished. It is better so."

THE END

DRIVEN BACK TO EDEN

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By DODD, MEAD, & COMPANY.

THIS VOLUME

IS LOVINGLY DEDICATED TO

"JOHNNIE"

PREFACE

MONTHS since, with much doubt and diffidence, I began this simple story. I had never before written expressly for young people, and I knew that the honest little critics could not be beguiled with words which did not tell an interesting story. How far I have succeeded, the readers of this volume, and of the "St. Nicholas" magazine, wherein the tale appeared as a serial, alone can answer.

I have portrayed no actual experience, but have sought to present one which might be verified in real life. I have tried to avoid all that would be impossible or even improbable. The labors performed by the children in the story were not unknown to my own hands, in childhood, nor would they form tasks too severe for many little hands now idle in the cities.

The characters are all imaginary; the scenes, in the main, are real: and I would gladly lure other families from tenement flats into green pastures.

E. P. R.

CORNWALL-ON-THE-HUDSON,
August 10, 1885.

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DRIVEN BACK TO EDEN

CHAPTER I

A PROBLEM

"WHERE are the children?"

"They can't be far away," replied my wife, looking up from her preparations for supper. "Bobsey was here a moment ago. As soon as my back's turned he's out and away. I haven't seen Merton since he brought his books from school, and I suppose Winnie is upstairs with the Daggetts."

"I wish, my dear, you could keep the children at home more," I said, a little petulantly.

"I wish you would go and find them for me now, and to-morrow take my place—for just one day."

"Well, well," I said, with a laugh that had no mirth in it; "only one of your wishes stands much chance of being carried out. I'll find the children now if I can without the aid of the police. Mousie, do you feel stronger to-night?"

These words were spoken to a pale girl of fourteen, who appeared to be scarcely more than twelve, so diminutive was her frame.

"Yes, papa," she replied, a faint smile flitting like a ray of light across her features. She always said she was better, but never got well. Her quiet ways and tones had led to the household name of "Mousie."

As I was descending the narrow stairway I was almost overthrown by a torrent of children pouring down from the flats above. In the dim light of a gas-burner I saw that

Bobsey was one of the reckless atoms. He had not heard my voice in the uproar, and before I could reach him, he with the others had burst out at the street door and gone tearing toward the nearest corner. It seemed that he had slipped away in order to take part in a race, and I found him "squaring off" at a bigger boy who had tripped him up. Without a word I carried him home, followed by the jeers and laughter of the racers, the girls making their presence known in the early December twilight by the shrillness of their voices and by manners no gentler than those of the boys.

I put down the child—he was only seven years of age—in the middle of our general living-room, and looked at him. His little coat was split out in the back; one of his stockings, already well-darned at the knees, was past remedy; his hands were black, and one was bleeding; his whole little body was throbbing with excitement, anger, and violent exercise. As I looked at him quietly the defiant expression in his eyes began to give place to tears.

"There is no use in punishing him now," said my wife. "Please leave him to me and find the others."

"I wasn't going to punish him," I said.

"What are you going to do? What makes you look at him so?"

"He's a problem I can't solve—with the given conditions."

"O Robert, you drive me half wild. If the house was on fire you'd stop to follow out some train of thought about it all. I'm tired to death. Do bring the children home. When we've put them to bed you can figure on your problem, and I can sit down."

"As I went up to the Daggetts' flat I was dimly conscious of another problem. My wife was growing fretful and nervous. Our rooms would not have satisfied a Dutch housewife, but if "order is heaven's first law" a little of Paradise was in them as compared to the Daggetts' apartments. "Yes," I was told, in response to my inquiries; "Winnie is in the bed-room with Melissy."

The door was locked, and after some hesitation the girls opened it. As we were going downstairs I caught a glimpse of a newspaper in my girl's pocket. She gave it to me reluctantly, and said "Melissy" had lent it to her. I told her to help her mother prepare supper while I went to find Merton. Opening the paper under a street lamp, I found it to be a cheap, vile journal, full of flashy pictures that so often offend the eye on news-stands. With a chill of fear I thought, "Another problem." The Daggett children had had the scarlet fever a few months before. "But here's a worse infection," I reflected. "Thank heaven, Winnie is only a child, and can't understand these pictures;" and I tore the paper up and thrust it into its proper place, the gutter.

"Now," I muttered, "I've only to find Merton in mischief to make the evening's experience complete."

In mischief I did find him—a very harmful kind of mischief, it appeared to me. Merton was little over fifteen, and he and two or three other lads were smoking cigarettes which, to judge by their odor, must certainly have been made from the sweepings of the manufacturer's floor.

"Can't you find anything better than that to do after school?" I asked, severely.

"Well, sir," was the sullen reply, "I'd like to know what there is for a boy to do in this street."

During the walk home I tried to think of an answer to his implied question. What would I do if I were in Merton's place? I confess that I was puzzled. After sitting in school all day he must do something that the police would permit. There certainly seemed very little range of action for a growing boy. Should I take him out of school and put him into a shop or an office? If I did this his education would be sadly limited. Moreover he was tall and slender for his age, and upon his face there was a pallor which I dislike to see in a boy. Long hours of business would be very hard upon him, even if he could endure the strain at all. The problem which had been pressing on me for months—almost years—grew urgent.

With clouded brows we sat down to our modest little supper. Winifred, my wife, was hot and flushed from too near acquaintance with the stove, and wearied by a long day of toil in a room that would be the better for a gale of wind. Bobsey, as we called my little namesake, was absorbed—now that he was relieved from the fear of punishment—by the wish to "punch" the boy who had tripped him up. Winnie was watching me furtively, and wondering what had become of the paper, and what I thought of it. Merton was somewhat sullen, and a little ashamed of himself. I felt that my problem was to give these children something to do that would not harm them, for do *something* they certainly would. They were rapidly attaining that age when the shelter of a narrow city flat would not answer, when the influence of a crowded house and of the street might be greater than any we could bring to bear upon them.

I looked around upon the little group for whom I was responsible. My will was still law to them. While my little wife had positive ways of her own, she would agree to any decided course that I resolved upon. The children were yet under entire control, so that I sat at the head of the table, commander-in-chief of the little band. We called the narrow flat we lived in "home." The idea! with the Daggetts above and the Ricketts on the floor beneath. It was not a home, and was scarcely a fit camping-ground for such a family squad as ours. Yet we had stayed on for years in this long, narrow line of rooms, reaching from a crowded street to a little back-yard full of noisy children by day, and noisier cats by night. I had often thought of moving, but had failed to find a better shelter that was within my very limited means. The neighborhood was respectable, so far as a densely populated region can be. It was not very distant from my place of business, and my work often kept me so late at the office that we could not live in the suburb. The rent was moderate for New York, and left me some money, after food and clothing were provided, for occasional little outings and pleasures, which I believe to be needed by both

body and mind. While the children were little—so long as they would "stay put" in the cradle or on the floor—we did not have much trouble. Fortunately I had good health, and, as my wife said, was "handy with children." Therefore I could help her in the care of them at night, and she had kept much of her youthful bloom. Heaven had blessed us. We had met with no serious misfortunes, nor had any of our number been often prostrated by prolonged and dangerous illness. But during the last year my wife had been growing thin, and occasionally her voice had a sharpness which was new. Every month Bobsey became more hard to manage. Our living-room was to him like a cage to a wild bird, and slip away he would, to his mother's alarm; for he was almost certain to get into mischief or trouble. The effort to perform her household tasks and watch over him was more wearing than it had been to rock him through long hours at night when he was a teething baby. These details seem very homely no doubt, yet such as these largely make up our lives. Comfort or discomfort, happiness or unhappiness, springs from them. There is no crop in the country so important as that of boys and girls. How could I manage my little home-garden in a flat?

I looked thoughtfully from one to another, as with children's appetites they became absorbed in one of the chief events of the day.

"Well," said my wife, querulously, "how are you getting on with your problem?"

"Take this extra bit of steak and I'll tell you after the children are asleep," I said.

"I can't eat another mouthful," she exclaimed, pushing back her almost untasted supper. "Broiling the steak was enough for me."

"You are quite tired out, dear," I said, very gently.

Her face softened immediately at my tone and tears came into her eyes.

"I don't know what is the matter with me," she faltered. "I am so nervous some days that I feel as if I should fly to

pieces. I do try to be patient, but I know I'm growing cross!"

"Oh now, mamma," spoke up warm-hearted Merton; "the idea of your being cross."

"She *is* cross," Bobsey cried; "she boxed my ears this very day."

"And you deserved it," was Merton's retort. "It's a pity they are not boxed oftener."

"Yes, Robert, I did," continued my wife, sorrowfully. "Bobsey ran away four times, and vexed me beyond endurance, that is, such endurance as I have left, which doesn't seem to be very much."

"I understand, dear," I said. "You are a part of my problem, and you must help me solve it." Then I changed the subject decidedly, and soon brought sunshine to our clouded household. Children's minds are easily diverted; and my wife, whom a few sharp words would have greatly irritated, was soothed, and her curiosity awakened as to the subject of my thoughts.

CHAPTER II

I STATE THE CASE

I PONDERED deeply while my wife and Winnie cleared away the dishes and put Bobsey into his little crib. I felt that the time for a decided change had come, and that it should be made before the evils of our lot brought sharp and real trouble.

How should I care for my household? If I had been living on a far frontier among hostile Indians I should have known better how to protect them. I could build a house of heavy logs and keep my wife and children always near me while at work. But it seemed to me that Melissa Daggett and her kin with their flashy papers, and the influence of the street for Merton and Bobsey, involved more danger to my little band than all the scalping Modocs that ever whooped. The children could not step outside the door without danger of meeting some one who would do them harm. It is the curse of crowded city life that there is so little of a natural and attractive sort for a child to do, and so much of evil close at hand.

My wife asked me humorously for the news. She saw that I was not reading my paper, and my frowning brow and firm lips proved my problem was not of a trifling nature. She suspected nothing more, however, than that I was thinking of taking rooms in some better locality, and she was wondering how I could do it, for she knew that my income now left but a small surplus above expenses.

At last Winnie too was ready to go to bed, and I said to her, gravely: "Here is money to pay Melissa for that paper.

It was only fit for the gutter, and into the gutter I put it. I wish you to promise me never to look at such pictures again, or you can never hope to grow up to be a lady like mamma."

The child flushed deeply, and went tearful and penitent to bed. Mousie also retired with a wistful look upon her face, for she saw that something of grave importance occupied my mind.

No matter how tired my wife might be, she was never satisfied to sit down until the room had been put in order, a green cloth spread upon the supper-table and the student lamp placed in its centre.

Merton brought his school-books, and my wife took up her mending, and we three sat down within the circle of light.

"Don't do any more work to-night," I said, looking into my wife's face, and noting for a few moments that it was losing its rounded lines.

Her hands dropped wearily into her lap, and she began gratefully: "I'm glad you speak so kindly to-night, Robert, for I am so nervous and out of sorts that I couldn't have stood one bit of fault-finding—I should have said things, and then have been sorry all day to-morrow. Dear knows, each day brings enough without carrying anything over. Come, read the paper to me, or tell me what you have been thinking about so deeply, if you don't mind Merton's hearing you. I wish to forget myself, and work, and everything that worries me, for a little while."

"I'll read the paper first, and then, after Merton has learned his lessons, I will tell you my thoughts—my purpose, I may almost say. Merton shall know about it soon, for he is becoming old enough to understand the 'why' of things. I hope, my boy, that your teacher lays a good deal of stress on the *why* in all your studies."

"Oh, yes, after a fashion."

"Well, so far as I am your teacher, Merton, I wish you always to think why you should do a thing or why you shouldn't, and to try not to be satisfied with any reason but a good one."

Then I gleaned from the paper such items as I thought would interest my wife. At last we were alone, with no sound in the room but the low roar of the city, a roar so deep as to make one think that the tides of life were breaking waves.

I was doing some figuring in a note-book when my wife asked: "Robert, what is your problem to-night? And what part have I in it?"

"So important a part that I couldn't solve it without you," I replied, smiling at her.

"Oh, come now," she said, laughing slightly for the first time in the evening; "you always begin to flatter a little when you want to carry a point."

"Well, then, you are on your guard against my wiles. But believe me, Winifred, the problem on my mind is not like one of my ordinary brown studies; in those I often try to get back to the wherefore of things which people usually accept and don't bother about. The question I am considering comes right home to us, and we must meet it. I have felt for some time that we could not put off action much longer, and to-night I am convinced of it."

Then I told her how I had found three of the children engaged that evening, concluding: "The circumstances of their lot are more to blame than they themselves. And why should I find fault with you because you are nervous? You could no more help being nervous and a little impatient than you could prevent the heat of the lamp from burning you, should you place your finger over it. I know the cause of it all. As for Mousie, she is growing paler and thinner every day. You know what my income is; we could not change things much for the better by taking other rooms and moving to another part of the city, and we might find that we had changed for the worse. I propose that we go to the country and get our living out of the soil."

"Why, Robert! what do you know about farming or gardening?"

"Not very much, but I am not yet too old to learn;

and there would be something for the children to do at once, pure air for them to breathe, and space for them to grow healthfully in body, mind, and soul. You know I have but little money laid by, and am not one of those smart men who can push their way. I don't know much besides book-keeping, and my employers think I am not remarkably quick at that. I can't seem to acquire the lightning speed with which things are done nowadays; and while I try to make up by long hours and honesty, I don't believe I could ever earn much more than I am getting now, and you know it doesn't leave much of a margin for sickness or misfortune of any kind. After all, what does my salary give us but food and clothing and shelter, such as it is, with a little to spare in some years? It sends a cold chill to my heart to think what should become of you and the children if I should be sick or anything should happen to me. Still, it is the present welfare of the children that weighs most on my mind, Winifred. They are no longer little things that you can keep in these rooms and watch over; there is danger for them just outside that door. It wouldn't be so if beyond the door lay a garden and fields and woods. You, my overtaxed wife, wouldn't worry about them the moment they were out of sight, and my work, instead of being away from them all day, could be with them. And all could do something, even down to pale Mousie and little Bobsey. Outdoor life and pure air, instead of that breathed over and over, would bring quiet to your nerves and the roses back to your cheeks. The children would grow sturdy and strong; much of their work would be like play to them; they wouldn't be always in contact with other children that we know nothing about. I am aware that the country isn't Eden, as we have imagined it—for I lived there as a boy—but it seems like Eden compared to this place and its surroundings; and I feel as if I were being driven back to it by circumstances I can't control."

CHAPTER III

NEW PROSPECTS

THERE is no need of dwelling further on the reasons for or against the step we proposed. We thought a great deal and talked it over several times. Finally my wife agreed that the change would be wise and best for all. Then the children were taken into our confidence, and they became more delighted every day as the prospect grew clearer to them.

"We'll all be good soon, won't we?" said my youngest, who had a rather vivid sense of his own shortcomings, and kept them in the minds of others as well.

"Why so, Bobsey?"

"'Cause mamma says that God put the first people in a garden and they was very good, better'n any folks afterwards. God oughter know the best place for people."

Thus Bobsey gave a kind of divine sanction to our project. Of course we had not taken so important a step without asking the Great Father of all to guide us; for we felt that in the mystery of life we too were but little children who knew not what should be on the morrow, or how best to provide for it with any certainty. To our sanguine minds there was in Bobsey's words a hint of something more than permission to go up out of Egypt.

So it was settled that we should leave our narrow suite of rooms, the Daggetts and the Ricketts, and go to the country. To me naturally fell the task of finding the land flowing with milk and honey to which we should journey in

the spring. Meantime we were already emigrants at heart, full of the bustle and excitement of mental preparation.

I prided myself somewhat on my knowledge of human nature, which, in regard to children, conformed to comparatively simple laws. I knew that the change would involve plenty of hard work, self-denial and careful managing, which nothing could redeem from prose; but I aimed to add to our exodus, so far as possible, the elements of adventure and mystery so dear to the hearts of children. The question where we should go was the cause of much discussion, the studying of maps, and the learning of not a little geography.

Merton's counsel was that we should seek a region abounding in Indians, bears, and "such big game." His advice made clear the nature of some of his recent reading. He proved, however, that he was not wanting in sense by his readiness to give up these attractive features in the choice of locality.

Mousie's soft black eyes always lighted up at the prospect of a flower-garden that should be as big as our sitting-room. Even in our city apartments, poisoned by gas and devoid of sunlight, she usually managed to keep a little house-plant in bloom, and the thought of placing seeds in the open ground, where, as she said, "the roots could go down to China if they wanted to," brought the first color I had seen in her face for many a day.

Winnie was our strongest child, and also the one who gave me the most anxiety. Impulsive, warm-hearted, restless, she always made me think of an overfull fountain. Her alert black eyes were as eager to see as was her inquisitive mind to pry into everything. She was sturdily built for a girl, and one of the severest punishments we could inflict was to place her in a chair and tell her not to move for an hour. We were beginning to learn that we could no more keep her in our sitting-room than we could restrain a mountain brook that foams into a rocky basin only to foam out again. Melissa Daggett was of a very different type—I could never see her without the word "sly" coming into

my mind—and her small mysteries awakened Winnie's curiosity. Now that the latter was promised chickens, and rambles in the woods, Melissa and her secrets became insignificant, and the ready promise to keep aloof from her was given.

As for Bobsey, he should have a pig which he could name and call his own, and for which he might pull weeds and pick up apples. We soon found that he was communing with that phantom pig in his dreams.

CHAPTER IV

A MOMENTOUS EXPEDITION

BY the time Christmas week began we all had agreed to do without candy, toys, and knick-knacks, and to buy books that would tell us how to live in the country. One happy evening we had an early supper and all went to a well-known agricultural store and publishing-house on Broadway, each child almost awed by the fact that I had fifteen dollars in my pocket which should be spent that very night in the purchase of books and papers. To the children the shop seemed like a place where tickets direct to Eden were obtained, while the colored pictures of fruits and vegetables could portray the products of Eden only, so different were they in size and beauty from the specimens appearing in our market stalls. Stuffed birds and animals were also on the shelves, and no epicure ever enjoyed the gamy flavor as we did. But when we came to examine the books, their plates exhibiting almost every phase of country work and production, we felt like a long vista leading toward our unknown home was opening before us, illumined by alluring pictures. To Winnie was given a book on poultry, and the cuts representing the various birds were even more to her taste than cuts from the fowls themselves at a Christmas dinner. The Nimrod instincts of the race were awakened in Merton, and I soon found that he had set his heart on a book that gave an account of game, fish, birds, and mammals. It was a natural and wholesome longing. I myself had felt it keenly when a boy. Such country sport would bring sturdiness to his limbs and the right kind of color into his face.

"All right, Merton," I said: "you shall have the book and a breech-loading shot-gun also. As for fishing-tackle, you can get along with a pole cut from the woods until you have earned money enough yourself to buy what you need."

The boy was almost overwhelmed. He came to me, and took my hand in both his own.

"O papa," he faltered, and his eyes were moist, "did you say a gun?"

"Yes, a breech-loading shot-gun on one condition—that you'll not smoke till after you are twenty-one. A growing boy can't smoke in safety."

He gave my hand a quick, strong pressure, and was immediately at the farther end of the store, blowing his nose suspiciously. I chuckled to myself: "I want no better promise. A gun will cure him of cigarettes better than a tract would."

Mousie was quiet, as usual; but there was again a faint color in her cheeks, a soft lustre in her eyes. I kept near my invalid child most of the time, for fear that she would go beyond her strength. I made her sit by a table, and brought the books that would interest her most. Her sweet, thin face was a study, and I felt that she was already enjoying the healing caresses of Mother Nature. When we started homeward she carried a book about flowers next to her heart.

Bobsey taxed his mother's patience and agility, for he seemed all over the store at the same moment, and wanted everything in it, being sure that fifteen dollars would buy all and leave a handsome margin; but at last he was content with a book illustrated from beginning to end with pigs.

What pleased me most was to see how my wife enjoyed our little outing. Wrapped up in the children, she reflected their joy in her face, and looked almost girlish in her happiness. I whispered in her ear, "Your present shall be the home itself, for I shall have the deed made out in your name, and then you can turn me out-of-doors as often as you please."

"Which will be every pleasant day after breakfast," she

said, laughing. "You know you are very safe in giving things to me."

"Yes, Winifred," I replied, pressing her hand on the sly; "I have been finding that out ever since I gave myself to you."

I bought Henderson's "Gardening for Profit" and some other practical books. I also subscribed for a journal devoted to rural interests and giving simple directions for the work of each month. At last we returned. Never did a jollier little procession march up Broadway. People were going to the opera and evening companies, and carriages rolled by, filled with elegantly dressed ladies and gentlemen; but my wife remarked, "None of those people are so happy as we are, trudging in this roundabout way to our country home."

Her words suggested our course of action during the months which must intervene before it would be safe or wise for us to leave the city. Our thoughts, words, and actions were all a roundabout means to our cherished end, and yet the most direct way that we could take under the circumstances. Field and garden were covered with snow, the ground was granite-like from frost, and winter's cold breath chilled our impatience to be gone; but so far as possible we lived in a country atmosphere, and amused ourselves by trying to conform to country ways in a city flat. Even Winnie declared she heard the cocks crowing at dawn, while Bobsey had a different kind of grunt or squeal for every pig in his book.

CHAPTER V

A COUNTRY CHRISTMAS IN A CITY FLAT

ON Christmas morning we all brought out our purchases and arranged them on a table. Merton was almost wild when he found a bright single-barrelled gun with accoutrements standing in the corner. Even Mousie exclaimed with delight at the bright-colored papers of flower-seeds on her plate. To Winnie were given

half a dozen china eggs with which to lure the prospective biddies to lay in nests easily reached, and she tried to cackle over them in absurd imitation. Little Bobsey had to have some toys and candy, but they all presented to his eyes the natural inmates of the barn-yard. In the number of domestic animals he swallowed that day he equalled the little boy in Hawthorne's story of "The House of the Seven Gables," who devoured a ginger-bread caravan of camels and elephants purchased at Miss Hepzibah Pyncheon's shop.

Our Christmas dinner consisted almost wholly of such vegetables as we proposed to raise in the coming summer. Never before were such connoisseurs of carrots, beats, onions, parsnips, and so on through almost the entire list of such winter stock as was to be obtained at our nearest green-grocery. We celebrated the day by nearly a dozen dishes which the children aided my wife in preparing. Then I had Merton figure the cost of each, and we were surprised at the cheapness of much of country fare, even when retailed in very small quantities.

This brought up another phase of the problem. In many respects I was like the children, having almost as much to learn as they—with the advantage, however, of being able to correct impressions by experience. In other words, I had more judgment; and while I should certainly make mistakes, not many of them would be absurd or often repeated. I was aware that most of the homely kitchen vegetables cost comparatively little, even though (having in our flat no good place for storage) we had found it better to buy what we needed from day to day. It was therefore certain that, at wholesale in the country, they would often be exceedingly cheap. This fact would work both ways: little money would purchase much food of certain kinds, and if we produced these articles of food they would bring us little money.

I will pass briefly over the period that elapsed before it was time for us to depart, assured that the little people who are following this simple history are as eager to get away

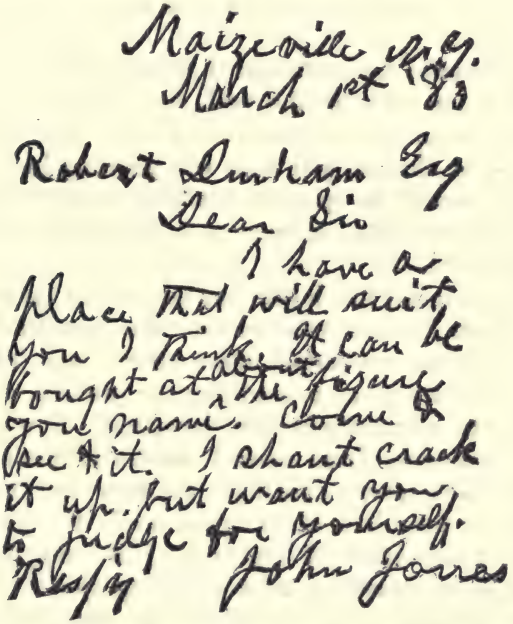
from the dusty city flat to the sunlight, breezy fields, brooks, and woods as were the children in my story. It is enough to say that, during all my waking hours not devoted to business, I read, thought, and studied on the problem of supporting my family in the country. I haunted Washington Market in the gray dawn and learned from much inquiry what products found a ready and certain sale at some price, and what appeared to yield to the grower the best profits. There was much conflict of opinion, but I noted down and averaged the statements made to me. Many of the marketmen had hobbies, and told me how to make a fortune out of one or two articles; more gave careless, random, or ignorant answers; but here and there was a plain, honest, sensible fellow who showed me from his books what plain, honest, sensible producers in the country were doing. In a few weeks I dismissed finally the tendency to one blunder. A novice hears or reads of an acre of cabbages or strawberries producing so much. Then he figures, "if one acre yields so much, two acres will give twice as much," and so on. The experience of others showed me the utter folly of all this; and I came to the conclusion that I could give my family shelter, plain food, pure air, wholesome work and play in plenty, and that not very soon could I provide much else with certainty. I tried to stick closely to common-sense; and the humble circumstances of the vast majority living from the soil proved that there was in these pursuits no easy or speedy road to fortune. Therefore we must part reluctantly with every penny, and let a dollar go for only the essentials to the modest success now accepted as all we could naturally expect. We had explored the settled States, and even the Territories, in fancy; we had talked over nearly every industry from cotton and sugar-cane planting to a sheep-ranch. I encouraged all this, for it was so much education out of school-hours; yet all, even Merton, eventually agreed with me that we had better not go far away, but seek a place near schools, markets, churches, and well inside of civilization.

"See here, youngsters, you forget the most important crop of all that I must cultivate," I said one evening.

"What is that?" they cried in chorus.

"A crop of boys and girls. You may think that my mind is chiefly on corn and potatoes. Not at all. It is chiefly on you; and for your sakes mamma and I decided to go to the country."

At last, in reply to my inquiries and my answers to advertisements, I received the following letter:—


Maizeville N.Y.
March 1st 93

Robert Dunham Esq
Dear Sir
I have a
place that will suit
you I think. It can be
bought at about figure
your name. Come &
see it. I shant crack
it up. but want you
to judge for yourself.
Resp'y John Jones

I had been to see two or three places that had been "cracked up" so highly that my wife thought it better to close the bargain at once before some one else secured the prize—and I had come back disgusted in each instance.

"The soul of wit" was in John Jones's letter. There was also a downright directness which hit the mark, and I wrote that I would go to Maizeville in the course of the following week.

CHAPTER VI

A BLUFF FRIEND

THE almanac had announced spring; nature appeared quite unaware of the fact, but, so far as we were concerned, the almanac was right. Spring was the era of hope, of change, and hope was growing in our hearts like "Jack's bean," in spite of lowering wintry skies. We were as eager as robins, sojourning in the south, to take our flight northward.

My duties to my employers had ceased the 1st of March: I had secured tenants who would take possession of our rooms as soon as we should leave them; and now every spare moment was given to studying the problem of country living and to preparations for departure. I obtained illustrated catalogues from several dealers in seeds, and we pored over them every evening. At first they bewildered us with their long lists of varieties, while the glowing descriptions of new kinds of vegetables just being introduced awakened in us something of a gambling spirit.

"How fortunate it is," exclaimed my wife, "that we are going to the country just as the vegetable marvels were discovered! Why, Robert, if half of what is said is true, we shall make our fortunes."

With us, hitherto, a beet had been a beet, and a cabbage a cabbage; but here were accounts of beets which, as Merton said, "beat all creation," and pictures of prodigious cabbage heads which well-nigh turned our own. With a blending of hope and distrust I carried two of the catalogues

to a shrewd old fellow in Washington Market. He was a dealer in country produce who had done business so long at the same stand that among his fellows he was looked upon as a kind of patriarch. During a former interview he had replied to my questions with a blunt honesty that had inspired confidence.

The day was somewhat mild, and I found him in his shirt-sleeves, smoking his pipe among his piled-up barrels, boxes, and crates, after his eleven o'clock dinner. His day's work was practically over; and well it might be, for, like others of his calling, he had begun it long before dawn. Now his old felt hat was pushed well back on his bald head, and his red face, fringed with a grizzled beard, expressed a sort of heavy, placid content. His small gray eyes twinkled as shrewdly as ever. With his pipe he indicated a box on which I might sit while we talked.

"See here, Mr. Bogart," I began, showing him the seed catalogues, "how is a man to choose wisely what vegetables he will raise from a list as long as your arm? Perhaps I shouldn't take any of those old-fashioned kinds, but go into these wonderful novelties which promise a new era in horticulture."

The old man gave a contemptuous grunt; then, removing his pipe, he blew out a cloud of smoke that half obscured us both as he remarked, gruffly, " 'A fool and his money are soon parted.' "

This was about as rough as March weather; but I knew my man, and perhaps proved that I wasn't a fool by not parting with him then and there.

"Come now, neighbor," I said, brusquely, "I know some things that you don't, and there are affairs in which I could prove you to be as green as I am in this matter. If you came to me I'd give you the best advice that I could, and be civil about it into the bargain. I've come to you because I believe you to be honest and to know what I don't. When I tell you that I have a little family dependent on me, and that I mean if possible to get a living for them out of the

soil, I believe you are man enough both to fall in with my plan and to show a little friendly interest. If you are not, I'll go farther and fare better."

As I fired this broadside he looked at me askance, with the pipe in the corner of his mouth, then reached out his great brown paw, and said,—

"Shake."

I knew it was all right now—that the giving of his hand meant not only a treaty of peace but also a friendly alliance. The old fellow discoursed vegetable wisdom so steadily for half an hour that his pipe went out.

"You jest let that new-fangled truck alone," he said, "till you get more forehanded in cash and experience. Then you may learn how to make something out of them novelties, as they call 'em, if they are worth growing at all. Now and then a good penny is turned on a new fruit or vegetable; but how to do it will be one of the last tricks that you'll learn in your new trade. Hand me one of them misleadin' books, and I'll mark a few solid kinds such as produce ninety-nine hundredths of all that's used or sold. Then you go to What-you-call-'em's store, and take a line from me, and you'll git the genu*ine* article at market-gardeners' prices."

"Now, Mr. Bogart, you are treating me like a man and a brother."

"Oh thunder! I'm treating you like one who, p'raps, may deal with me. Do as you please about it, but if you want to take along a lot of my business cards and fasten 'em to anything you have to sell, I'll give you all they bring, less my commission."

"I've no doubt you will, and that's more than I can believe of a good many in your line, if all's true that I hear. You have thrown a broad streak of daylight into my future. So you see the fool didn't part with his money, or with you either, until he got a good deal more than he expected."

Well, well, Mr. Durham, you'll have to get used to my rough ways. When I've anything to say, I don't beat about

the bush. But you'll always find my checks good for their face."

"Yes, and the face back of them is that of a friend to me now. We'll shake again. Good-by;" and I went home feeling as if I had solid ground under my feet. At supper I went over the whole scene, taking off the man in humorous pantomime, not ridicule, and even my wife grew hilarious over her disappointed hopes of the "new-fangled truck." I managed, however, that the children should not lose the lesson that a rough diamond is better than a smooth paste stone, and that people often do themselves an injury when they take offence too easily.

"I see it all, papa," chuckled Merton; "if you had gone off mad when he the same as called you a fool, you would have lost all his good advice."

"I should have lost much more than that, my boy, I should have lost the services of a good friend and an honest man to whom we can send for its full worth whatever we can't sell to better advantage at home. But don't mistake me, Merton, toadyism never pays, no matter what you may gain by it; for you give manhood for such gain, and that's a kind of property that one can never part with and make a good bargain. You see the old man didn't mean to be insolent. As he said, it was only his rough, blunt way of saying what was uppermost in his mind."

CHAPTER VII

MR. JONES SHOWS ME THE PLACE

THE next day, according to appointment, I went to Maizeville. John Jones met me at the station, and drove me in his box-sleigh to see the farm he had written of in his laconic note. I looked at him curiously as we jogged along over the melting snow. The day was unclouded for a wonder, and the sun proved its increasing power by turning the sleigh-tracks in the road into gleaming rills. The visage of my new acquaintance formed a decided contrast to the rubicund face of the beef-eating marketman. He was sandy even to his eyebrows and complexion. His scraggy beard suggested poverty of soil on his lantern jaws. His frame was as gaunt as that of a scare-crow, and his hands and feet were enormous. He had one redeeming feature, however—a pair of blue eyes that looked straight at you and made you feel that there was no "crookedness" behind them.

His brief letter had led me to expect a man of few words, but I soon found that John Jones was a talker and a good-natured gossip. He knew every one we met, and was usually greeted with a rising inflection, like this, "How are you, John?"

We drove inland for two or three miles.

"No, I didn't crack up the place, and I ain't a-goin' to," said my real-estate agent. "As I wrote you, you can see for yourself when we get there, and I'll answer all questions square. I've got the sellin' of the property, and I mean it shall be a good bargain, good for me and good for him who

buys. I don't intend havin' any neighbors around blamin' me for a fraud;" and that is all he would say about it.

On we went, over hills and down dales, surrounded by scenery that seemed to me beautiful beyond all words, even in its wintry aspect.

"What mountain is that standing off by itself?" I asked.

"Schunemunk," he said. "Your place—well, I guess it will be yours before plantin'-time comes—faces that mountain and looks up the valley between it and the main highlands on the left. Yonder's the house, on the slope of this big round hill, that'll shelter you from the north winds."

I shall not describe the place very fully now, preferring that it should be seen through the eyes of my wife and children, as well as my own.

"The dwelling appears old," I said.

"Yes; part of it's a good deal more'n a hundred years old. It's been added to at both ends. But there's timbers in it that will stand another hundred years. I had a fire made in the livin'-room this mornin', to take off the chill, and we'll go in and sit down after we've looked the place over. Then you must come and take pot-luck with us."

At first I was not at all enthusiastic, but the more I examined the place, and thought it over, the more it grew on my fancy. When I entered the main room of the cottage, and saw the wide, old-fashioned fireplace, with its crackling blaze, I thawed so rapidly that John Jones chuckled. "You're amazin' refreshin' for a city chap. I guess I'll crack on another hundred to the price."

"I thought you were not going to crack up the place at all."

"Neither be I. Take that old arm-chair, and I'll tell you all about it. The place looks rather run down, as you have seen. Old Mr. and Mrs. Jamison lived here till lately. Last January the old man died, and a good old man he was. His wife has gone to live with a daughter. By the will I was app'inted executor and trustee. I've fixed on a fair price for the property, and I'm goin' to hold on till I get it.

There's twenty acres of plowable land and orchard, and a five-acre wood-lot, as I told you. The best part of the property is this. Mr. Jamison was a natural fruit-grower. He had a heap of good fruit here and wouldn't grow nothin' but the best. He was always a-speerin' round, and when he come across something extra he'd get a graft, or a root or two. So he gradually came to have the best there was a-goin' in these parts. Now I tell you what it is, Mr. Durham, you can buy plenty of new, bare places, but your hair would be gray before you'd have the fruit that old man Jamison planted and tended into bearing condition; and you can buy places with fine shade trees and all that, and a good show of a garden and orchard, but Jamison used to say that an apple or cherry was a pretty enough shade tree for him, and he used to say too that a tree that bore the biggest and best apples didn't take any more room than one that yielded what was fit only for the cider press. Now the p'int's just here. You don't come to the country to amuse yourself by developin' a property, like most city chaps do, but to make a livin'. Well, don't you see? This farm is like a mill. When the sun's another month higher it will start all the machinery in the apple, cherry, and pear trees and the small fruits, and it will turn out a crop the first year you're here that will put money in your pocket."

Then he named the price, half down and the rest on mortgage, if I so preferred. It was within the limit that my means permitted.

I got up and went all over the house, which was still plainly furnished in part. A large wood-house near the back door had been well filled by the provident old man. There was ample cellar room, which was also a safeguard against dampness. Then I went out and walked around the house. It was all so quaint and homely as to make me feel that it would soon become home-like to us. There was nothing smart to be seen, nothing new except a barn that had recently been built near one of the oldest and grayest structures of the kind I had ever seen. The snow-clad moun-

tains lifted themselves about me in a way that promised a glimpse of beauty every time I should raise my eyes from work. Yet after all my gaze lingered longest on the orchard and fruit-trees that surrounded the dwelling.

"That's sensible," remarked Mr. Jones, who followed me with no trace of anxiety or impatience. "Paint, putty, and pine will make a house in a few weeks, but it takes a good slice out of a century to build up an orchard like that."

"That was just what I was thinking, Mr. Jones."

"Oh, I knowed that. Well, I've got just two more things to say, then I'm done and you can take it or leave it. Don't you see? The house is on a slope facing the south-east. You get the morning sun and the southern breeze. Some people don't know what they're worth, but I, who've lived here all my life, know they're worth payin' for. Again, you see the ground slopes off to the crick yonder. That means good drainage. We don't have any malary here, and that fact is worth as much as the farm, for I wouldn't take a section of the garden of Eden if there was malary around."

"On your honor now, Mr. Jones, how far is the corner around which they have the malaria?"

"Mr. Durham, it ain't a mile away."

I laughed as I said, "I shall have one neighbor, it seems, to whom I can lend an umbrella."

"Then you'll take the place?"

"Yes, if my wife is as well satisfied as I am. I want you to give me the refusal of it for one week at the price you named."

"Agreed, and I'll put it in black and white."

"Now, Mr. Jones," I began with an apologetic little laugh, "you grow one thing up here in all seasons, I fancy—an appetite. As I feel now, your pot-luck means good luck, no matter what is in it."

"Now you talk sense. I was a-hankerin' myself. I take stock right off in a man or a critter with an appetite. They're always improvin'. Yes, sir; Maizeville is the place to grow an appetite, and what's more we can grow plenty to satisfy it."

Mrs. Jones made a striking contrast to her husband, for she first impressed me as being short, red, and round; but her friendly, bustling ways and hearty welcome soon added other and very pleasant impressions; and when she placed a great dish of fricasseed chicken on the table she won a good-will which her neighborly kindness has steadily increased.

CHAPTER VIII

TELLING ABOUT EDEN

NEVER was a traveller from a remote foreign clime listened to with more breathless interest than I as I related my adventures at our late supper after my return. Mousie looked almost feverish in her excitement, and Winnie and Bobsey exploded with merriment over the name of the mountain that would be one of our nearest neighbors. They dubbed the place "Schunemunks" at once. Merton put on serious and sportsman-like airs as he questioned me, and it was evident that he expected to add largely to our income from the game he should kill. I did not take much pains to dispel his illusions, knowing that one day's tramp would do this, and that he would bring back increased health and strength if nothing else.

No fairy tale had ever absorbed the children like the description of that old house and its surroundings; and when at last they were induced to retire I said to my wife, after explaining more in practical detail the pros and cons to be considered: "It all depends on you. If you wish I will take you up the first pleasant day, so that you can see for yourself before we decide."

She laughed as she said, "I decided two minutes after you arrived."

"How is that?"

"I saw you had the place in your eyes. La, Robert! I can read you like a book. You give in to me in little things, and that pleases a woman, you know. You must decide a question like this, for it is a question of support for

us all, and you can do better on a place that suits you than on one never quite to your mind. It has grown more and more clear to me all the evening that you have fallen in love with the old place, and that settles it."

"Well, you women have a way of your own of deciding a question."

My wife was too shrewd not to make a point in her favor, and she remarked, with a complacent nod, "I have a way of my own, but there are women in the world who would have insisted on a smart new house."

"Little wife," I said, laughing, "there was another girl that I was a little sweet on before I met you. I'm glad you are not the other girl."

She put her head a little to one side with the old roguish look which used to be so distracting when the question of questions with me was whether pretty Winnie Barlow would give half a dozen young fellows the go-by for my sake, and she said, "Perhaps the other girl is glad too."

"I've no doubt she is," I sighed, "for her husband is getting rich. I don't care how glad she is if my girl is not sorry."

"You do amuse me so, Robert! You'd like to pass for something of a philosopher, with your brown studies into the hidden causes and reasons for things, yet you don't half know yet that when a woman sets her heart on something, she hasn't much left with which to long for anything else. That is, if she has a heart, which seems to be left out of some women."

"I think it is, and others get a double allowance. I should be content, for I was rich the moment I won yours."

"I've been more than content; I've been happy—happy all these years in city flats. Even in my tantrums and bad days I knew I was happy, deep in my heart."

"I only hope you will remain as blind about your plodding old husband who couldn't make a fortune in the city."

"I've seen men who made fortunes, and I've seen their wives too."

I thanked God for the look on her face—a look which had been there when she was a bride, and which had survived many straitened years.

So we chose our country home. The small patrimony to which we had added but little—(indeed we had often denied ourselves in order not to diminish it)—was nearly all to be invested in the farm, and a debt to be incurred, besides. While yielding to my fancy, I believed that I had at the same time chosen wisely, for, as John Jones said, the mature fruit trees of the place would begin to bring returns very soon.

CHAPTER IX

"BREAKING CAMP"

WE were now all eager to get away, and the weather favored our wishes. A warm rain with a high south wind set in, and the ice disappeared from the river like magic. I learned that the afternoon boat which touched at Maizeville would begin its trips in the following week.

I told my wife about the furniture which still remained in the house, and the prices which John Jones put upon it. We therefore found that we could dispose of a number of bulky articles in our city apartments, and save a goodly sum in cartage and freight. Like soldiers short of ammunition, we had to make every dollar tell, and when by thought and management we could save a little it was talked over as a triumph to be proud of.

The children entered into the spirit of the thing with great zest. They were all going to be hardy pioneers. One evening I described the landing of the "Mayflower," and some of the New-England winters that followed, and they wished to come down to Indian meal at once as a steady diet. Indeed, toward the last, we did come down to rather plain fare, for in packing up one thing after another we at last reached the cooking utensils.

On the morning of the day preceding the one of our departure I began to use military figures of speech.

"Now we must get into marching order," I said, "and prepare to break camp. Soldiers, you know, when about to move, dispose of all their heavy baggage, cook several

days' provisions, pack up and load on wagons what they mean to take with them, and start. It is a trying time—one that requires the exercise of good soldierly qualities, such as prompt obedience, indifference to hardship and discomfort, and especially courage in meeting whatever happens."

Thus the children's imaginations were kindled, and our prosaic breaking up was a time of grand excitement. With grim satisfaction they looked upon the dismantling of the rooms, and with sighs of relief saw carts take away such heavy articles as I had sold.

Winnie and Bobsey were inclined to take the children of neighbors into their confidence, and to have them around, but I said that this would not do at all—that when soldiers were breaking camp the great point was to do everything as secretly and rapidly as possible. Thenceforward an air of mystery pervaded all our movements.

Bobsey, however, at last overstepped the bounds of our patience and became unmanageable. The very spirit of mischief seemed to have entered his excited little brain. He untied bundles, placed things where they were in the way, and pestered the busy mother with so many questions, that I hit upon a decided measure to keep him quiet. I told him about a great commander who, in an important fight, was strapped to a mast, so that he could oversee everything. Then I tied the little fellow into a chair. At first he was much elated, and chattered like a magpie, but when he found he was not to be released after a few moments he began to howl for freedom. I then carried him, chair and all, to one of the back rooms. Soon his cries ceased, and tender-hearted Mousie stole after him. Returning she said, with her low laugh, "He'll be good now for a while; he's sound asleep."

And so passed the last day in our city rooms. Except as wife and children were there, they had never appeared very homelike to me, and now they looked bare and comfortless indeed. The children gloated over their appear-

ance, for it meant novelty to them. "The old camp is about broken up," Merton remarked, with the air of a veteran. But my wife sighed more than once.

"What troubles you, Winifred?"

"Robert, the children were born here, and here I've watched over them in sickness and health so many days and nights."

"Well, my dear, the prospects are that in our new home you will not have to watch over them in sickness very much. Better still, you will not have to be so constantly on your guard against contagions that harm the soul as well as the body. I was told that there are rattle-snakes on Schunemunk, but greater dangers for Winnie and Merton lurk in this street—yes, in this very house;" and I exulted over the thought that we were about to bid Melissa Daggett a final good-by.

"Oh, I know. I'm glad; but then—"

"But then a woman's heart takes root in any place where she has loved and suffered. That tendency makes it all the more certain that you'll love your new home."

"Yes; we may as well face the truth, Robert. We shall suffer in the new home as surely as in the old. There may be stronger sunshine, but that means deeper shadow."

CHAPTER X

SCENES ON THE WHARF

THE last night in the city flat was in truth like camp-ing out, and we looked and felt like emigrants. But the fatigues of the day brought us sound sleep, and in the morning we rose with the dawn, from our shake-downs on the floor, to begin eagerly and hopefully our final preparations for departure. In response to my letters John Jones had promised to meet us at the Maizeville Landing with his strong covered rockaway, and to have a fire in the old farmhouse. Load after load was despatched to the boat, for I preferred to deal with one trusty truckman. When all had been taken away, we said good-by to our neighbors and took the horse-car to the boat, making our quiet exit in the least costly way. I knew the boat would be warm and comfortable, and proposed that we should eat our lunch there.

The prospect, however, of seeing the wharves, the boats, and the river destroyed even the children's appetites. We soon reached the crowded dock. The great steamer appeared to be a part of it, lying along its length with several gang-ways, over which boxes, barrels, and packages were being hustled on board with perpetual din. The younger children were a little awed at first by the noise and apparent con-fusion. Mousie kept close to my side, and even Bobsey clung to his mother's hand. The extended upper cabin had state-rooms opening along its sides, and was as com-fortable as a floating parlor with its arm and rocking chairs. Here, not far from the great heater, I established our head-

quarters. I made the children locate the spot carefully, and said: "From this point we'll make excursions. In the first place, Merton, you come with me and see that all our household effects are together and in good order. You must learn to travel and look after things like a man."

We spent a little time in arranging our goods so that they would be safer and more compact. Then we went to the captain and laughingly told him we were emigrants to Maizeville, and hoped before long to send a good deal of produce by his boat. We therefore wished him to "lump" us, goods, children, and all, and deliver us safely at the Maizeville wharf for as small a sum as possible.

He good-naturedly agreed, and I found that the chief stage of our journey would involve less outlay than I had expected.

Thus far all had gone so well that I began to fear that a change must take place soon, in order that our experience should be more like the common lot of humanity. When at last I took all the children out on the after-deck, to remove the first edge of their curiosity, I saw that there was at least an ominous change in the weather. The morning had been mild, with a lull in the usual March winds. Now a scud of clouds was drifting swiftly in from the eastward, and chilly, fitful gusts began to moan and sigh about us. A storm was evidently coming, and my hope was that we might reach our haven before it began. I kept my fears to myself, and we watched the long lines of carts converging toward the gang-planks of our own and other steamboats.

"See, youngsters," I cried, "all this means commerce. These loads and loads of things will soon be at stores and homes up the river, supplying the various needs of the people. To-morrow the residents along the river will bring what they have to sell to this same boat, and by daylight next morning carts will be carrying country produce and manufactured articles all over the city. Thus you see commerce is made by people supplying themselves and each other with what they need. Just as soon as we can bring down a

crate of berries and send it to Mr. Bogart we shall be adding to the commerce of the world in the best way. We shall become what are called the 'producers,' and but for this class the world would soon come to an end."

"'Rah!" cried Bobsey, "I'm goin' to be a p'oducer."

He promised, however, to be a consumer for a long time to come, especially of patience. His native fearlessness soon asserted itself, and he wanted to go everywhere and see everything, asking questions about machinery, navigation, river craft, the contents of every box, bale, or barrel we saw, till I felt that I was being used like a town pump. I pulled him back to the cabin, resolving to stop his mouth for a time at least with the contents of our lunch-basket.

Winnie was almost as bad—or as good, perhaps I should say; for, however great the drain and strain on me might be, I knew that these active little brains were expanding to receive a host of new ideas.

Mousie was quiet as usual, and made no trouble, but I saw with renewed hope that this excursion into the world awakened in her a keen and natural interest. Ever since the project of country life had been decided upon, her listless, weary look had been giving place to one of greater animation. The hope of flowers and a garden had fed her life like a deep, hidden spring.

To Merton I had given larger liberty, and had said: "It is not necessary for you to stay with me all the time. Come and go on the boat and wharf as you wish. Pick up what knowledge you can. All I ask is that you will use good sense in keeping out of trouble and danger."

I soon observed that he was making acquaintances here and there, and asking questions which would go far to make good his loss of schooling for a time. Finding out about what one sees is, in my belief, one of the best ways of getting an education. The trouble with most of us is that we accept what we see, without inquiry or knowledge.

The children were much interested in scenes witnessed from the side of the boat farthest from the wharf. Here

in the enclosed water-space were several kinds of craft, but the most curious in their eyes was a group of canal-boats—"queer travelling houses" Mousie called them; for it was evident that each one had a family on board, and the little entrance to the hidden cabin resembled a hole from which men, women, and children came like rabbits out of a burrow. Tough, hardy, barefooted children were everywhere. While we were looking, one frowsy-headed little girl popped up from her burrow in the boat, and, with legs and feet as red as a boiled lobster, ran along the guards like a squirrel along a fence.

"O dear!" sighed Mousie, "I'd rather live in a city flat than in such a house."

"I think it would be splendid," protested Winnie, "to live in a travelling house. You could go all over and still stay at home."

I was glad on our return to find my wife dozing in her chair. She was determined to spend in rest the hours on the boat, and had said that Mousie also must be quiet much of the afternoon.

Between three and four the crush on the wharf became very great. Horses and drays were so mixed up that to inexperienced eyes it looked as if they could never be untangled. People of every description, loaded down with parcels, were hurrying on board, and it would seem from our point of view that American women shared with their French sisters an aptness for trade, for among the passengers were not a few substantial, matronly persons who appeared as if they could look the world in the face and get the better of it.

CHAPTER XI

A VOYAGE UP THE HUDSON

AS four P. M. approached, I took the children to a great glass window in the cabin, through which we could see the massive machinery.

"Now," said I, "watch the steel giant; he is motionless, but in a moment or two he will move."

True enough, he appeared to take a long breath of steam, and then slowly lifted his polished arms, or levers, and the boat that had been like a part of the wharf began to act as if it were alive and were waking up.

"Now," I asked, "shall we go to the after-deck and take our last look at the city, or forward and see the river and whither we are going?"

"Forward! forward!" cried all in chorus.

"That's the difference between youth and age," I thought. "With the young it is always 'forward.'" But we found that we could not go out on the forward deck, for the wind would have carried away my light, frail Mousie, like a feather. Indeed it was whistling a wild tune as we stood in a small room with glass windows all round. The waves were crowned with foaming white-caps, and the small craft that had to be out in the gale were bobbing up and down, as if possessed. On the river was a strange and lurid light, which seemed to come more from the dashing water than from the sky, so dark was the latter with skurrying clouds.

Mousie clung timidly to my side, but I reassured her by saying: "See how steadily, how evenly and boldly, our great craft goes out on the wide river. In the same way

we must go forward, and never be afraid. These boats run every day after the ice disappears, and they are managed by men who know what to do in all sorts of weather."

She smiled, but whispered, "I think I'll go back and stay with mamma;" but she soon found much amusement in looking at passing scenes from the windows of the warm after-cabin—scenes that were like pictures set in oval frames.

The other children appeared fascinated by the scene, especially Winnie, whose bold black eyes flashed with excitement.

"I want to see everything and know everything," she said.

"I wish you to see and know about things like these," I replied, "but not such things as Melissa Daggett would show you."

"Melissy Daggett, indeed!" cried Winnie. "This beats all her stories. She tried to tell me the other day about a theatre at which a woman killed a man—"

"Horrid! I hope you didn't listen?"

"Only long enough to know the man came to life again, and danced in the next—"

"That will do. I'm not interested in Melissa's vulgar stories. As you say, this, and all like this, is much better, and will never prevent you from becoming a lady like mamma."

Winnie's ambition to become a lady promised to be one of my strong levers in uplifting her character.

I confess that I did not like the looks of the sky or of the snow-flakes that began to whirl in the air, but the strong steamer plowed her way rapidly past the city and the villa-crowned shores beyond. The gloom of the storm and of early coming night was over all, and from the distant western shores the Palisades frowned dimly through the obscurity.

My wife came, and after a brief glance shivered and was turning away, when I said, "You don't like your first glimpse of the country, Winifred?"

"It will look different next June. The children will take cold here. Let them come and watch the machinery."

This we all did for a time, and then I took them on excursions about the enclosed parts of the boat. The lamps were already lighted, and the piled-up freight stood out in grotesque light and shadow.

Before very long we were standing by one of the furnace rooms, and the sooty-visaged man threw open the iron doors of the furnace. In the glare of light that rushed forth everything near stood out almost as vividly as it would have done in a steady gleam of lightning. The fireman instantly became a startling silhouette, and the coal that he shovelled into what was like a flaming mouth of a cavern seemed sparkling black diamonds. The snow-flakes glimmered as the wind swept them by the wide-open window, and in the distance were seen the lights and the dim outline of another boat rushing toward the city. Clang! the iron doors are shut, and all is obscure again.

"Now the boat has had its supper," said Bobsey. "O dear! I wish I could have a big hot supper."

The smoking-room door stood open, and we lingered near it for some moments, attracted first by a picture of a great fat ox, that suggested grassy meadows, plowing, juicy steaks, and other pleasant things. Then our attention was drawn to a man, evidently a cattle-dealer, who was holding forth to others more or less akin to him in their pursuits.

"Yes," he was saying, "people in the country eat a mighty lot of cow-beef, poor and old at that. I was buying calves out near Shawangunk Mountains last week, and stopped at a small tavern. They brought me a steak and I tried to put my knife in it—thought the knife might be dull, but knew my grinders weren't. Jerusalem! I might have chawed on that steak till now and made no impression. I called the landlord, and said, 'See here, stranger, if you serve me old boot-leather for steak again I'll blow on your house.'—'I vow,' he said, 'it's the best I kin get in these diggin's. You fellers from the city buy up every likely crit-

ter that's for sale, and we have to take what you leave.' You see, he hit me right between the horns, for it's about so. Bless your soul, if I'd took in a lot of cow-beef like that to Steers and Pinkham, Washington Market, they'd 'a taken my hide off and hung me up 'longside of my beef."

"Grantin' all that," said another man, "folks in the country would be a sight better off if they'd eat more cow-beef and less pork. You know the sayin' about 'out of the frying-pan into the fire'? Well, in some parts I've travelled they had better get out of the fryin'-pan, no matter where they fetch up."

We went away laughing, and I said: "Don't you be troubled, Mousie; we won't go to the frying-pan altogether to find roses for your cheeks. We'll paint them red with strawberries and raspberries, the color put on from the inside."

As time passed, the storm increased, and the air became so thick with driving snow that the boat's speed was slackened. Occasionally we "slowed up" for some moments. The passengers shook their heads and remarked, dolefully, "There's no telling when we'll arrive."

I made up my mind that it would be good economy for us all to have a hearty hot supper, as Bobsey had suggested; and when, at last, the gong resounded through the boat, we trooped down with the others to the lower cabin, where there were several long tables, with colored waiters in attendance. We had not been in these lower regions before, and the eyes of the children soon wandered from their plates to the berths, or sleeping-bunks, which lined the sides of the cabin.

"Yes," I replied, in answer to their questions; "it is a big supper-room now, but by and by it will be a big bedroom, and people will be tucked away in these berths, just as if they were laid on shelves, one over the other."

The abundant and delicious supper, in which steaks, not from cow-beef, were the chief feature, gave each one of us solid comfort and satisfaction. Bobsey ate until the pas-

sengers around him were laughing, but he, with superb indifference, attended strictly to business.

My wife whispered, "You must all eat enough to last a week, for I sha'n't have time to cook anything;" and I was much pleased at the good example which she and Mousie set us.

Both before and after supper I conducted Bobsey to the wash-room, and he made the people laugh as he stood on a chair and washed his face. But he was a sturdy little fellow, and only laughed back when a man said he looked as though he was going to dive into the basin.

Mousie at last began to show signs of fatigue; and learning that it would be several hours still before we could hope to arrive, so severe was the storm, I procured the use of a state-room, and soon Bobsey was snoring in the upper berth, and my invalid girl smiling and talking in soft tones to her mother in the lower couch. Winnie, Merton, and I prowled around, spending the time as best we could. Occasionally we looked through the windows at the bow, and wondered how the pilot could find his way through the tempest. I confess I had fears lest he might not do this, and felt that I should be grateful indeed when my little band was safe on shore. The people in charge of the boat, however, knew their business.

CHAPTER XII

A MARCH EVENING IN EDEN

AT length we were fast at the Maizeville Landing, although long after the usual hour of arrival. I was anxious indeed to learn whether John Jones would meet us, or whether, believing that we would not come in such a storm, and tired of waiting, he had gone home and left us to find such shelter as we could.

But there he was, looking in the light of the lanterns as grizzled as old Time himself, with his eyebrows and beard full of snow-flakes. He and I hastily carried the three younger children ashore through the driving snow, and put them in a corner of the storehouse, while Merton followed with his mother.

"Mr. Jones," I exclaimed, "you are a neighbor to be proud of already. Why didn't you go home and leave us to our fate?"

"Well," he replied, laughing, "'twouldn't take you long to get snowed under to-night. No, no; when I catch fish I mean to land 'em. Didn't know but what in such a buster of a storm you might be inclined to stay on the boat and go back to the city. Then where would my bargain be?"

"No fear of that. We're in for it now—have enlisted for the war. What shall we do?"

"Well, I vow I hardly know. One thing first, anyhow—we must get Mrs. Durham and the kids into the warm waiting-room, and then look after your traps."

The room was already crowded, but we squeezed them in, white from scarcely more than a moment's exposure

to the storm. Then we took hold and gave the deck-hands a lift with my baggage, Merton showing much manly spirit in his readiness to face the weather and the work. My effects were soon piled up by themselves, and then we held a council.

"Mrs. Durham'll hardly want to face this storm with the children," began Mr. Jones.

"Are you going home?" I asked.

"Yes, sir. I'd rather travel all night for the sake of being home in the morning."

"To tell the truth I feel the same way," I continued, "but reason must hold the reins. Do you think you could protect Mrs. Durham and the children from the storm?"

"Yes, I think we could tuck 'em in so they'd scarcely know it was snowin', and then we could sled your things up in the mornin'. 'Commodations on the landin' to-night will be pretty crowded."

"We'll let her decide, then."

When I explained how things were and what Mr. Jones had said, she exclaimed, "Oh, let us go home."

How my heart jumped at her use of the word "home" in regard to a place that she had never seen. "But, Winifred," I urged, "do you realize how bad a night it is? Do you think it would be safe for Mousie?"

"It isn't so very cold if one is not exposed to the wind and snow," she replied, "and Mr. Jones says we needn't be exposed. I don't believe we'd run as much risk as in going to a little hotel, the best rooms of which are already taken. Since we can do it, it will be so much nicer to go to a place that we feel is our own!"

"I must say that your wishes accord with mine."

"Oh, I knew that," she replied, laughing. "Mr. Jones," she added, sociably, "this man has a way of telling you what he wishes by his looks before asking your opinion."

"I found that out the day he came up to see the place," chuckled my neighbor, "and I was half a mind to stick him for another hundred for being so honest. He don't know

how to make a bargain any more than one of the children there. Well, I'll go to the shed and get the hosses, and we'll make a pull for home. I don't believe you'll be sorry when you get there."

Mr. Jones came around to the very door with the rockaway, and we tucked my wife and children under the buffalo robes and blankets till they could hardly breathe. Then we started out into the white, spectral world, for the wind had coated everything with the soft, wet snow. On we went at a slow walk, for the snow and mud were both deep, and the wheeling was very heavy. Even John Jones's loquacity was checked, for every time he opened his mouth the wind half filled it with snow. Some one ahead of us, with a lantern, guided our course for a mile or so through the dense obscurity, and then he turned off on another road. At first I hailed one and another in the black cavern of the rockaway behind me, and their muffled voices would answer, "All right." But one after another they ceased to answer me until all were fast asleep except my wife. She insisted that she was only very drowsy, but I knew that she was also very, very tired. Indeed, I felt myself, in a way that frightened me, the strange desire to sleep that overcomes those long exposed to cold and wind.

I must have been nodding and swaying around rather loosely, when I felt myself going heels over head into the snow. As I picked myself up I heard my wife and children screaming, and John Jones shouting to his horses, "Git up," while at the same time he lashed them with his whip. My face was so plastered with snow that I could see only a dark object which was evidently being dragged violently out of a ditch, for when the level road was reached, Mr. Jones shouted, "Whoa!"

"Robert, are you hurt?" cried my wife.

"No, are you?"

"Not a bit, but I'm frightened to death."

Then John Jones gave a hearty guffaw and said:

"I bet you our old shanghai rooster that you don't die."

"Take you up," answered my wife, half laughing and half crying.

"Where are we?" I asked.

"I'm here. Haven't the remotest idea where you be," replied Mr. Jones.

"You are a philosopher," I said, groping my way through the storm toward his voice.

"I believe I was a big fool for tryin' to get home such a night as this; but now that we've set about it, we'd better get there. That's right. Scramble in and take the reins. Here's my mittens."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to 'light and smell out the road. This is equal to any blizzard I've read of out West."

"How far have we to go now?"

"Half a mile, as nigh as I can make out;" and we jogged on again.

"Are you sure you are not hurt?" Mousie asked me.

"Sure; it was like tumbling into a feather bed."

"Stop a bit," cried Mr. Jones. "There's a turn in the road here. Let me go on a little and lay out your course."

"Oh, I wish we had stayed anywhere under shelter," said my wife.

"Courage," I cried. "When we get home, we'll laugh over this."

"Now," shouted Mr. Jones, "veer gradually off to the left toward my voice—all right;" and we jogged on again, stopping from time to time to let our invisible guide explore the road.

Once more he cried, "Stop a minute."

The wind roared and shrieked around us, and it was growing colder. With a chill of fear I thought, "Could John Jones have mistaken the road?" and I remembered how four people and a pair of horses had been frozen within a few yards of a house in a Western snow-storm.

"Are you cold, children?" I asked.

"Yes, I'm freezing," sobbed Winnie. "I don't like the country one bit."

"This is different from the Eden of which we have been dreaming," I thought grimly. Then I shouted, "How much farther, Mr. Jones?"

The howling of the wind was my only answer. I shouted again. The increasing violence of the tempest was the only response.

"Robert," cried my wife, "I don't hear Mr. Jones's voice."

"He has only gone on a little to explore," I replied, although my teeth chattered with cold and fear.

"Halloo—oo!" I shouted. The answering shriek of the wind in the trees overhead chilled my very heart.

"What has become of Mr. Jones?" asked my wife, and there was almost anguish in her tone, while Winnie and Bobsey were actually crying aloud.

"Well, my dear," I tried to say, reassuringly, "even if he were very near to us we could neither see nor hear him."

Moments passed which seemed like ages, and I scarcely knew what to do. The absence of all signs of Mr. Jones filled me with a nameless and unspeakable dread. Could anything have happened to him? Could he have lost his way and fallen into some hole or over some steep bank? If I drove on, we might tumble after him and perish, maimed and frozen, in the wreck of the wagon. One imagines all sorts of horrible things when alone and helpless at night.

"Papa," cried Merton, "I'll get out and look for Mr. Jones."

"You are a good, brave boy," I replied. "No; you hold the reins, and I'll look for him and see what is just before us."

At that moment there was a glimmer of light off to the left of us.

CHAPTER XIII

RESCUED AND AT HOME

ALL that the poets from the beginning of time have written about light could not express my joy as I saw that glimmer approaching on the left. Before it appeared I had been awed by the tempest, benumbed with cold, shivering in my wet clothes, and a prey to many terrible fears and surmises; but now I cried, "Cheer up; here comes a light."

Then in my gladness I shouted the greeting that met Mr. Jones everywhere, "How *are* YOU, JOHN?"

A great guffaw of laughter mingled with the howl of the storm, and my neighbor's voice followed from the obscurity: "That's famous—keepin' up your courage like a soldier."

"Oh, I won't brag about keeping up my courage."

"Guess you didn't know what had become of me?"

"You're right and we didn't know what was to become of us. Now aren't we nearly home? For we are all half frozen."

"Just let me spy a bit with the lantern, and I'll soon tell you everything." He bobbed back and forth for a moment or two like a will-o'-the-wisp. "Now turn sharp to the left, and follow the light."

A great hope sprung up in my heart, and I hushed Winnie's and Bobsey's crying by saying, "Listen, and you'll soon hear some good news."

Our wheels crunched through the deep snow for a few moments, and soon I saw a ruddy light shining from the

window of a dwelling, and then Mr. Jones shouted, "Whoa! 'Light down, neighbors; you're at your own door."

There was a chorus of delighted cries. Merton half tumbled over me in his eagerness to get down. A door opened, and out poured a cheerful glow. Oh the delicious sense of safety and warmth given by it already!

I seized Mousie, floundered through the snow up to my knees, and placed her in a big rocking-chair. Mr. Jones followed with Winnie, and Merton came in with Bobsey on his back. The little fellow was under such headway in crying that he couldn't stop at once, although his tears were rapidly giving place to laughter. I rushed back and carried in my wife, and then said, in a voice a little unsteady from deep feeling, "Welcome home, one and all."

Never did the word mean more to a half-frozen and badly frightened family. At first safety, warmth, and comfort were the uppermost in our thoughts, but as wraps were taken off, and my wife and children thawed out, eager-eyed curiosity began to make explorations. Taking Mousie on my lap, and chafing her hands, I answered questions and enjoyed to the full the exclamations of pleasure.

Mr. Jones lingered for a few moments, then gave one of his big guffaws by way of preface, and said: "Well, you do look as if you was at home and meant to stay. This 'ere scene kinder makes me homesick; so I'll say good-night, and I'll be over in the mornin'. There's some lunch on the table that my wife fixed up for you. I must go, for I hear John junior hollerin' for me."

His only response to our profuse thanks was another laugh, which the wind swept away.

"Who is John junior?" asked Merton.

"Mr. Jones's son, a boy of about your age. He was here waiting for us, and keeping the fire up. When we arrived he came out and took the horses, and so you didn't see him. He'll make a good playmate for you. To use his father's own words, 'He's a fairish boy as boys go,' and that from John Jones means that he's a good fellow."

Oh, what a happy group we were, as we gathered around the great, open fire, on which I piled more wood!

"Do you wish to go and look around a little?" I asked my wife.

"No," she replied, leaning back in her rocking-chair: "let me take this in first. O Robert, I have such a sense of rest, quiet, comfort, and hominess that I just want to sit still and enjoy it all. The howling of the storm only makes this place seem more like a refuge, and I'd rather hear it than the Daggetts tramping overhead and the Ricketts children crying down-stairs. Oh, isn't it nice to be by ourselves in this quaint old room? Turn the lamp down, Robert, so we can see the firelight flicker over everything. Isn't it splendid?—just like a picture in a book."

"No picture in a book, Winifred—no artist could paint a picture that would have the charm of this one for me," I replied, leaning my elbow on the end of the mantel-piece, and looking fondly down on the little group. My wife's face looked girlish in the ruddy light. Mousie gazed into the fire with unspeakable content, and declared she was "too happy to think of taking cold." Winnie and Bobsey were sitting, Turk-fashion, on the floor, their eyelids drooping. The long cold ride had quenched even their spirit, for after running around for a few moments they began to yield to drowsiness. Merton, with a boy's appetite, was casting wistful glances at the lunch on the table, the chief feature of which was a roast chicken.

There seemed to be no occasion for haste. I wished to let the picture sink deep into my heart. At last my wife sprang up and said:—

"I've been sentimental long enough. You're not of much account in the house, Robert"—with one of her saucy looks—"and I must see to things, or Winnie and Bobsey will be asleep on the floor. I feel as if I could sit here till morning, but I'll come back after the children are in bed. Come, show me my home, or at least enough of it to let me see where we are to sleep."

"We shall have to camp again to-night. Mrs. Jones has made up the one bed left in the house, and you and Mousie shall have that. We'll fix Winnie and Bobsey on the lounge; and, youngsters, you can sleep in your clothes, just as soldiers do on the ground. Merton and I will doze in these chairs before the fire. To-morrow night we can all be very comfortable."

I took the lamp and led the way—my wife, Mousie, and Merton following—first across a little hall, from which one stairway led to the upper chambers and another to the cellar. Opening a door opposite the living-room, I showed Winifred her parlor. Cosey and comfortable it looked, even now, through Mr. and Mrs. Jones's kind offices. A Morning Glory stove gave out abundant warmth and a rich light which blended genially with the red colors of the carpet.

"Oh, how pretty I can make this room look!" exclaimed my wife.

"Of course you can: you've only to enter it."

"You hurt your head when you fell out of the agon, Robert, and are a little daft. There's no place to sleep here."

"Come to the room over this, warmed by a pipe from this stove."

"Ah, this is capital," she cried, looking around an apartment which Mrs. Jones had made comfortable. "Wasn't I wise when I decided to come home? It's just as warm as toast. Now let the wind blow—Why, I don't hear it any more."

"No, the gale has blown itself out. Finding that we had escaped, it got discouraged and gave up. Connected with this room is another for Mousie and Winnie. By leaving the door open much of the time it will be warm enough for them. So you see this end of the house can be heated with but little trouble and expense. The open fire in the living-room is a luxury that we can afford, since there is plenty of wood on the place. On the other side of the hall

there is a room for Merton. Now do me a favor: don't look, or talk, or think, any more to-night. It has been a long, hard day. Indeed"—looking at my watch—"it is already to-morrow morning, and you know how much we shall have to do. Let us go back and get a little supper, and then take all the rest we can."

Winifred yielded, and Bobsey and Winnie waked up for a time at the word "supper." Then we knelt around our hearth, and made it an altar to God, for I wished the children never to forget our need of His fatherly care and help.

"I will now take the children upstairs and put them to bed, and then come back, for I can not leave this wood fire just yet," remarked my wife.

I burst out laughing and said, "You have never been at home until this night, when you are camping in an old house you never saw before, and I can prove it by one question—When have you taken the children *upstairs* to bed before?"

"Why—why—never."

"Of course you haven't—city flats all your life. But your nature is not perverted. In natural homes for generations mothers have taken their children upstairs to bed, and, forgetting the habit of your life, you speak according to the inherited instinct of the mother-heart."

"O Robert, you have so many fine-spun theories! Yet it is a little queer. It seemed just as natural for me to say upstairs as—"

"As it was for your mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother."

"Very well. We are in such an old house that I suppose I shall begin to look and act like my great-grandmother. But no more theories to-night—nothing but rest and the wood fire."

She soon joined me at the hearth again. Merton meanwhile had stretched himself on the rag-carpet, with his overcoat for a pillow, and was in dreamless sleep. My wife's eyes were full of languor. She did not sit down, but stood

beside me for a moment. Then, laying her head on my shoulder, she said, softly, "I haven't brains enough for theories and such things, but I will try to make you all happy here."

"Dear little wife!" I laughed; "when has woman hit upon a higher or better wisdom than that of making all happy in her own home? and you half asleep, too."

"Then I'll bid you good-night at once, before I say something awfully stupid."

Soon the old house was quiet. The wind had utterly ceased. I opened the door a moment, and looked on the white, still world without. The stars glittered frostily through the rifts in the clouds. Schunemunk Mountain was a shadow along the western horizon, and the eastern highlands banked up and blended with the clouds. Nature has its restless moods, its storms and passions, like human life; but there are times of tranquillity and peace, even in March. How different was this scene from the aspect of our city street when I had taken my farewell look at a late hour the previous night! No grand sweeping outlines there, no deep quiet and peace, soothing and at the same time uplifting the mind. Even at midnight there is an uneasy fretting in city life—some one not at rest, and disturbing the repose of others.

I stole silently through the house. Here, too, all seemed in accord with nature. The life of a good old man had quietly ceased in this home; new, hopeful life was beginning. Evil is everywhere in the world, but it seemed to me that we had as safe a nook as could be found

CHAPTER XIV

SELF-DENIAL AND ITS REWARD

I REMEMBER little that followed until I was startled out of my chair by a loud knocking. The sunlight was streaming in at the window and John Jones's voice was at the door.

"I think we have all overslept," I said, as I admitted him.

"Not a bit of it. Every wink you've had after such a day as yesterday is like money put in the bank. But the sleighing is better now than it will be later in the day. The sun'll be pretty powerful by noon, and the snow'll soon be slush. Now's your chance to get your traps up in a hurry. I can have a two-hoss sled ready in half an hour, and if you say so I can hire a big sleigh of a neighbor, and we'll have everything here by dinner-time. After you get things snug, you won't care if the bottom does fall out of the roads for a time. Well, you *have* had to rough it. Merton might have come and stayed with us."

"Oh, I'm all right," said the boy, rubbing his eyes open as he rose from the floor, at the same time learning from stiff joints that a carpet is not a mattress.

"Nothing would suit me better, Mr. Jones, than your plan of prompt action, and I'm the luckiest man in the world in having such a long-headed, fore-handed neighbor to start with. I know you'll make a good bargain for the other team, and before I sleep to-night I wish to square up for everything. I mean at least to begin business in this way at Maizeville."

"Oh, go slow, go slow!" said Mr. Jones. "The town

will mob you if they find you've got ready money in March. John junior will be over with a pot of coffee and a jug of milk in a few minutes, and we'll be off sharp."

There was a patter of feet overhead, and soon Bobsey came tearing down, half wild with excitement over the novelty of everything. He started for the door as if he were going head first into the snow.

I caught him, and said: "Do you see that chair? Well, we all have a busy day before us. You can help a good deal, and play a little, but you can't hinder and pester according to your own sweet will one bit. You must either obey orders or else be put under arrest and tied in the chair."

To go into the chair to-day would be torture indeed, and the little fellow was sobered at once.

The others soon joined us, eager to see everything by the broad light of day, and to enter upon the task of getting settled. We had scarcely come together before John junior appeared with the chief features of our breakfast. The children scanned this probable playmate very curiously, and some of us could hardly repress a smile at his appearance. He was even more sandy than his father. Indeed his hair and eyebrows were nearly white, but out of his red and almost full-moon face his mother's black eyes twinkled shrewdly. They now expressed only good-will and bashfulness. Every one of us shook hands with him so cordially that his boy's heart was evidently won.

Merton, to break the ice more fully, offered to show him his gun, which he had kept within reach ever since we left the boat. It made him feel more like a pioneer, no doubt. As he took it from its stout cloth cover I saw John junior's eyes sparkle. Evidently a deep chord was touched. He said, excitedly: "To-day's your time to try it. A rabbit can't stir without leaving his tracks, and the snow is so deep and soft that he can't get away. There's rabbits on your own place."

"O papa," cried my boy, fairly trembling with eagerness, "can't I go?"

"I need you very much this morning."

"But, papa, others will be out before me, and I may lose my chance;" and he was half ready to cry.

"Yes," I said; "there is a risk of that. Well, *you* shall decide in this case," I added, after a moment, seeing a chance to do a little character-building. "It is rarely best to put pleasure before business or prudence. If you go out into the snow with those boots, you will spoil them, and very probably take a severe cold. Yet you may go if you will. If you help me we can be back by ten o'clock, and I will get you a pair of rubber boots as we return."

"Will there be any chance after ten o'clock?" he asked, quickly.

"Well," said John junior, in his matter-of-fact way, "that depends. As your pa says, there's a risk."

The temptation was too strong for the moment. "O dear!" exclaimed Merton, "I may never have so good a chance again. The snow will soon melt, and there won't be any more till next winter. I'll tie my trousers down about my boots, and I'll help all the rest of the day after I get back."

"Very well," I said quietly: and he began eating his breakfast—the abundant remains of our last night's lunch —very rapidly, while John junior started off to get his gun.

I saw that Merton was ill at ease, but I made a sign to his mother not to interfere. More and more slowly he finished his breakfast, then took his gun and went to the room that would be his, to load and prepare. At last he came down and went out by another door, evidently not wishing to encounter me. John junior met him, and the boys were starting, when John senior drove into the yard and shouted, "John junior, step here a moment."

The boy returned slowly, Merton following. "You ain't said nothin' to me about goin' off with that gun," continued Mr. Jones, severely.

"Well, Merton's pa said he might go if he wanted to, and I had to go along to show him."

"That first shot wasn't exactly straight, my young friend John. I told Merton that it wasn't best to put pleasure before business, but that he could go if he would. I wished to let him choose to do right, instead of making him do right."

"Oho, that's how the land lays. Well, John junior, you can have your choice, too. You may go right on with your gun, but you know the length and weight of that strap at home. Now, will you help me? or go after rabbits?"

The boy grinned pleasantly, and replied, "If you had said I couldn't go, I wouldn't; but if it's choosin' between shootin' rabbits and a strappin' afterward—come along, Merton."

"Well, go along then," chuckled his father; "you've made your bargain square, and I'll keep my part of it."

"Oh, hang the rabbits! You shan't have any strapping on my account," cried Merton; and he carried his gun resolutely to his room and locked the door on it.

John junior quietly went to the old barn, and hid his gun.

"Guess I'll go with you, pa," he said, joining us.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Jones. "It was a good bargain to back out of. Come now, let's all be off as quick as we can. Neighbor Rollins down the road will join us as we go along."

"Merton," I said, "see if there isn't a barrel of apples in the cellar. If you find one, you can fill your pockets."

He soon returned with bulging pockets and a smiling face, feeling that such virtue as he had shown had soon brought reward. My wife said that while we were gone she and the children would explore the house and plan how to arrange everything. We started in good spirits.

"Here's where you thought you was cast away last night," Mr. Jones remarked, as we passed out of the lane.

The contrast made by a few short hours was indeed wonderful. Then, in dense obscurity, a tempest had howled and shrieked about us; now, in the unclouded sunshine, a gemmed and sparkling world revealed beauty everywhere.

For a long distance our sleighs made the first tracks,

and it seemed almost a pity to sully the purity of the white, drift-covered road.

"What a lot of mud's hid under this snow!" was John Jones's prose over the opening vistas. "What's more, it will show itself before night. We can beat all creation at mud in Maizeville, when once we set about it."

Merton laughed, and munched his apples, but I saw that he was impressed by winter scenery such as he had never looked upon before. Soon, however, he and John junior were deep in the game question, and I noted that the latter kept a sharp lookout along the roadside. Before long, while passing a thicket, he shouted, "There's tracks," and floundered out into the snow, Merton following.

"Oh, come back," growled his father.

"Let the boys have a few moments," I said. "They gave up this morning about as well as you could expect of boys. Would Junior have gone and taken a strapping if Merton hadn't returned?"

"Yes, indeed he would, and he knows my strappin's are no make-believe. That boy has no sly, mean tricks to speak of, but he's as tough and obstinate as a mule sometimes, especially about shooting and fishing. See him now a-p'intin' for that rabbit, like a hound."

True enough, the boy was showing good woodcraft. Restraining Merton, he cautiously approached the tracks, which by reason of the lightness and depth of the snow were not very distinct.

"He can't be far away," said Junior, excitedly. "Don't go too fast till I see which way he was a-p'intin'. We don't want to follow the tracks back, but for'ard. See, he came out of that old wall there, he went to these bushes and nibbled some twigs, and here he goes—here he went—here—here—yes, he went into the wall again just here. Now, Merton, watch this hole while I jump over the other side of the fence and see if he comes out again. If he makes a start, grab him."

John Jones and I were now almost as excited as the boys,

and Mr. Rollins, the neighbor who was following us, was standing up in his sleigh to see the sport. It came quickly. As if by some instinct the rabbit believed Junior to be the more dangerous, and made a break from the wall almost at Merton's feet, with such swiftness and power as to dash by him like a shot. The first force of its bound over, it was caught by nature's trap—snow too deep and soft to admit of rapid running.

John Jones soon proved that Junior came honestly by his passion for hunting. In a moment he was floundering through the bushes with his son and Merton. In such pursuit of game my boy had the advantage, for he was as agile as a cat. But a moment or two elapsed before he caught up with the rabbit, and threw himself upon it, then rose, white as a snow-man, shouting triumphantly and holding the little creature aloft by its ears.

"Never rate Junior for hunting again," I said, laughingly, to Mr. Jones. "He's a chip of the old block."

"I rather guess he is," my neighbor acknowledged, with a grin. "I own up I used to be pretty hot on such larkin'. We all keep forgettin' we was boys once."

As we rode on, Merton was a picture of exultation, and Junior was on the sharp lookout again. His father turned on him and said: "Now look a' here, enough's as good as a feast. I'll blindfold you if you don't let the tracks alone. Mrs. Durham wants her things, so she can begin to live. Get up there;" and a crack of the whip ended all further hopes on the part of the boys. But they felt well repaid for coming, and Merton assured Junior that he deserved half the credit, for only he knew how to manage the hunt.

CHAPTER XV

OUR SUNNY KITCHEN

BEFORE we reached the landing I had invested a goodly sum in four pairs of rubber boots, for I knew how hopeless it would be to try to keep Winnie and Bobsey indoors. As for Mousie, she would have to be prudent until the ground should become dry and warm.

There is no need of dwelling long on the bringing home of our effects and the getting to rights. We were back soon after ten, and found that Winnie and Bobsey, having exhausted the resources of the house, had been permitted to start at the front door, and, with an old fire-shovel and a piece of board, had well-nigh completed a path to the well, piling up the snow as they advanced, so that their overshoes were a sufficient protection.

After we had carried in the things I interceded with Mr. Jones and then told the boys that they could take their guns and be absent two or three hours if they would promise to help faithfully the rest of the day.

I had bought at Maizeville Landing such provisions, tools, etc., as I should need immediately. Therefore I did not worry because the fickle March sky was clouding up again with the promise of rain. A heavy downpour now with snow upon the ground would cause almost a flood, but I felt that we could shut the door and find the old house a very comfortable ark.

"A smart warm rain would be the best thing that could happen to yer," said Mr. Jones, as he helped me carry in furniture and put up beds; "it would take the snow off.

Nat'rally you want to get out on the bare ground, for there's allus a lot of clearin' up to be done in the spring and old man Jamison was poorly last year and didn't keep things up to the mark."

"Yes," I replied, "I am as eager to get to work outdoors as the boys were to go after rabbits. I believe I shall like the work, but that is not the question. I did not come to the country to amuse myself, like so many city people. I don't blame them; I wish I could afford farming for fun. I came to earn a living for my wife and children, and I am anxious to be about it. I won't ask you for anything except advice. I've only had a city training, and my theories about farming would perhaps make you smile. But I've seen enough of you already to feel that you are inclined to be kind and neighborly, and the best way to show this will be in helping me to good, sound, practical, common-sense advice. But you mustn't put on airs, or be impatient with me. Shrewd as you are, I could show you some things in the city."

"Oh, I'd be a sight queerer there than you here. I see your p'int, and if you'll come to me I won't let you make no blunders I wouldn't make myself. Perhaps that ain't saying a great deal, though."

By this time everything had been brought in and either put in place or stowed out of the way, until my wife could decide where and how she would arrange things.

"Now," I said, when we had finished, "carry out our agreement."

Mr. Jones gave me a wink and drove away.

Our agreement was this—first, that he and Mr. Rollins, the owner of the other team, should be paid in full before night; and second, that Mrs. Jones should furnish us our dinner, in which the chief dish should be a pot-pie from the rabbit caught by Merton, and that Mr. Jones should bring everything over at one o'clock.

My wife was so absorbed in unpacking her china, kitchen-utensils, and groceries that she was unaware of the flight of

time, but at last she suddenly exclaimed, "I declare it's dinner-time!"

"Not quite yet," I said; "dinner will be ready at one."

"It will? Oh, indeed! since we are in the country we are to pick up what we can, like the birds. You intend to invite us all down to the apple barrel, perhaps."

"Certainly, whenever you wish to go; but we'll have a hot dinner at one o'clock, and a game dinner into the bargain."

"I've heard the boys' guns occasionally, but I haven't seen the game, and it's after twelve now."

"Papa has a secret—a surprise for us," cried Mousie; "I can see it in his eyes."

"Now, Robert, I know what you've been doing. You have asked Mrs. Jones to furnish a dinner. You are extravagant, for I could have picked up something that would have answered."

"No; I've been very prudent in saving your time and strength, and saving these is sometimes the best economy in the world. Mousie is nearer right. The dinner is a secret, and it has been furnished chiefly by one of the family."

"Well, I'm too busy to guess riddles to-day; but if my appetite is a guide, it is nearly time we had your secret."

"You would not feel like that after half an hour over a hot stove. Now you will be interrupted, in getting to rights, only long enough to eat your dinner. Then Mousie and Merton and Winnie will clear up everything, and before night you will feel settled enough to take things easy till to-morrow."

"I know your thoughtfulness for me, if not your secret," she said, gratefully, and was again putting things where, from housewifely experience, she knew they would be handy.

Mr. and Mrs. Jamison had clung to their old-fashioned ways, and had done their cooking over the open fire, using the swinging crane which is now employed chiefly in pic-

tures. This, for the sake of the picture it made, we proposed to keep as it had been left, although at times it might answer some more prosaic purpose.

At the eastern end of the house was a single room, added unknown years ago, and designed to be a bed-chamber. Of late it had been used as a general storage and lumber room, and when I first inspected the house, I had found little in this apartment of service to us. So I had asked Mr. Jones to remove all that I did not care for, and to have the room cleansed, satisfied that it would just suit my wife as a kitchen. It was large, having windows facing the east and south, and therefore it would be light and cheerful, as a kitchen ever should be, especially when the mistress of the house is cook. There Mr. Jones and I set up the excellent stove that I had brought from New York—one to which my wife was accustomed, and from which she could conjure a rare good dinner when she gave her mind to it. Now as she moved back and forth, in such sunlight as the clouding sky permitted, she appeared the picture of pleased content.

"It cheers one up to enter a kitchen like this," she said.

"It is to be your garden for a time also," I exclaimed to Mousie. "I shall soon have by this east window a table with shallow boxes of earth, and in them you can plant some of your flower-seeds. I only ask that I may have two of the boxes for early cabbages, lettuce, tomatoes, etc. You and your plants can take a sun-bath every morning until it is warm enough to go out of doors, and you'll find the plants won't die here as they did in the dark, gas-poisoned city flat."

"I feel as if I were going to grow faster and stronger than the plants," cried the happy child.

Junior and Merton now appeared, each carrying a rabbit. My boy's face, however, was clouded, and he said, a little despondently, "I can't shoot straight—missed every time; and Junior shot 'em after I had fired and missed."

"Pshaw!" cried Junior; "Merton's got to learn to take

a quick steady sight, like every one else. He gets too excited."

"That's just it, my boy," I said. "You shall go down by the creek and fire at a mark a few times every day, and you'll soon hit it every time. Junior's head is too level to think that anything can be done well without practice. Now, Junior," I added, "run over home and help your father bring us our dinner, and then you stay and help us eat it."

Father and son soon appeared, well laden. Winnie and Bobsey came in ravenous from their path-making, and all agreed that we had already grown one vigorous rampant Maizeville crop—an appetite.

The pot-pie was exulted over, and the secret of its existence explained. Even Junior laughed till the tears came as I described him, his father, and Merton, floundering through the deep snow after the rabbit, and we all congratulated Merton as the one who had provided our first country dinner.

CHAPTER XVI

MAKING A PLACE FOR CHICKENS

BEFORE the meal was over, I said, seriously, "Now, boys, there must be no more hunting until I find out about the game-laws. They should be obeyed, especially by sportsmen. I don't think that we are forbidden to kill rabbits on our own place, particularly when they threaten to be troublesome; and the hunt this morning was so unexpected that I did not think of the law, which might be used to make us trouble. You killed the other rabbits on this place, Junior?"

"Yes, sir, both of 'em."

"Well, hereafter you must look after hawks, and other enemies of poultry. Especially do I hope you will never fire at our useful song-birds. If boys throughout the country would band together to protect game when out of season, they would soon have fine sport in the autumn."

In the afternoon we let Winnie and Bobsey expend their energy in making paths and lanes in every direction through the snow, which was melting rapidly in the south wind. By three o'clock the rain began to fall, and when darkness set in there was a gurgling sound of water on every side. Our crackling fire made the warmth and comfort within seem tenfold more cheery.

A hearty supper, prepared in our own kitchen, made us feel that our home machinery had fairly started, and we knew that it would run more and more smoothly. March was keeping up its bad name for storm and change. The wind was again roaring, but laden now with rain, and in

gusty sheets the heavy drops dashed against the windows. But our old house kept us dry and safe, although it rocked a little in the blasts. They soon proved a lullaby for our second night at home.

After breakfast the following morning, with Merton, Winnie, and Bobsey, I started out to see if any damage had been done. The sky was still clouded, but the rain had ceased. Our rubber boots served us well, for the earth was like an over-full sponge, while down every little incline and hollow a stream was murmuring.

The old barn showed the need of a good many nails to be driven here and there, and a deal of mending. Then it would answer for corn-stalks and other coarse fodder. The new barn had been fairly built, and the interior was dry. It still contained as much hay as would be needed for the keeping of a horse and cow until the new crop should be harvested.

"Papa," cried Winnie, "where is the chicken place?"

"That is one of the questions we must settle at once," I replied. "As we were coming out I saw an old coop in the orchard. We'll go and look at it."

It was indeed old and leaky, and had poultry been there the previous night they would have been half drowned on their perches. "This might do for a summer cottage for your chickens, Winnie," I continued, "but never for a winter house. Let us go back to the barn, for I think I remember a place that will just suit, with some changes."

Now the new barn had been built on a hillside, and had an ample basement, from which a room extending well into the bank had been partitioned, thus promising all one could desire as a cellar for apples and roots. The entrance to this basement faced the east, and on each side of it was a window. To the right of the entrance were two cow-stalls, and to the left was an open space half full of mouldy corn-stalks and other rubbish.

"See here, Winnie and Merton," I said, after a little examination, "I think we could clear out this space on the

left, partition it off, make a door, and keep the chickens here. After that window is washed, a good deal of sunlight can come in. I've read that in cold weather poultry need warmth and light, and must be kept dry. Here we can secure all these conditions. Having a home for ourselves, suppose we set to work to make a home for the chickens."

This idea delighted Winnie, and pleased Merton almost as much as hunting rabbits. "Now," I resumed, "we will go to the house and get what we need for the work."

"Winifred," I said to my wife, "can you let Winnie have a small pail of hot water and some old rags?"

"What are you up to now?"

"You know all about cleaning house; we are going to clean barn, and make a place for Winnie's chickens. There is a window in their future bedroom—roost-room I suppose I should call it—that looks as if it had never been washed, and to get off the dust of years will be Winnie's task, while Merton, Bobsey, and I create an interior that should satisfy a knowing hen. We'll make nests, too, children, that will suggest to the biddies that they should proceed at once to business."

"But where are the chickens to come from?" my wife asked, as she gave the pan to Merton to carry for his sister.

"Oh, John Jones will put me in the way of getting them soon;" and we started out to our morning's work. Mousie looked after us wistfully, but her mother soon found light tasks for her, and she too felt that she was helping. "Remember, Mousie," I said, in parting, "that I have three helpers, and surely mamma needs one;" and she was content.

Merton at first was for pitching all the old corn-stalks out into the yard, but I said: "That won't do. We shall need a cow as well as chickens, and these stalks must be kept dry for her bedding. We'll pile them up in the inner empty stall. You can help at that, Bobsey;" and we set to work.

Under Winnie's quick hands more and more light came through the window. With a fork I lifted and shook up

the stalks, and the boys carried them to the empty stall. At last we came to rubbish that was so damp and decayed that it would be of no service indoors, so we placed it on a barrow and I wheeled it out to one corner of the yard. At last we came down to a hard earth floor, and with a hoe this was cleared and made smooth.

"Merton," I said, "I saw an old broom upstairs. Run and get it, and we'll brush down the cobwebs and sweep out, and then we shall be ready to see about the partition."

CHAPTER XVII

GOOD BARGAINS IN MAPLE SUGAR

BY eleven o'clock we had all the basement cleaned with litter; and Winnie had washed the windows. except the one cow-stall that was filled to the ceiling Then John Jones's lank figure darkened the doorway, and he cried, "Hello, neighbor, what ye drivin' at?"

"Look around and see, and then tell us where to get a lot of chickens."

"Well, I declare! How you've slicked things up! You're not goin' to scrub the dirt floor, are you? Well, well, this looks like business—just the place for chickens. Wonder old man Jamison didn't keep 'em here; but he didn't care for fowls. Now I think of it, there's to be a vandoo the first of the week, and there was a lot o' chickens printed on the poster."

I smiled.

"Oh, I don't mean that the chickens themselves was on the poster, but a statement that a lot would be sold at auction. I'll bid 'em in for you if they're a good lot. If you, a city chap, was to bid, some straw-bidder would raise 'em agin you. I know what they're wuth, and everybody there'll know I do, and they'll try no sharp games with me."

"That will suit me exactly, Mr. Jones. I don't want any game-fowls of that kind."

"Ha, ha! I see the p'int. Have you looked into the root-cellar?"

"Yes; we opened the door and looked, but it was dark as a pocket."

"Well, I don't b'lieve in matches around a barn, but I'll

show you something;" and he opened the door, struck a match, and, holding it aloft, revealed a heap of turnips, another of carrots, five barrels of potatoes, and three of apples. The children pounced upon the last with appetites sharpened by their morning's work.

"You see," resumed Mr. Jones, "these were here when old man Jamison died. If I hadn't sold the place I should have taken them out before long, and got rid of what I didn't want. Now you can have the lot at a low figure," which he named.

"I'll take them," I said, promptly.

"The carrots make it look like a gold-mine," cried Merton.

"Well, you're wise," resumed Mr. Jones. "You'll have to get a cow and a horse, and here's fodder for 'em handy. Perhaps I can pick 'em out for you, too, at the vandoo. You can go along, and if anything strikes your fancy I'll bid on it."

"O papa," cried the children, in chorus, "can we go with you to the vandoo?"

"Yes, I think so. When does the sale take place?"

"Next Tuesday. That's a good breed of potatoes. Jamison allus had the best of everything. They'll furnish you with seed, and supply your table till new ones come. I guess you could sell a barrel or so of apples at a rise."

"I've found a market for them already. Look at these children; and I'm good for half a barrel myself if they don't decay too soon. Where could we find better or cheaper food? All the books say that apples are fattening."

"That's true of man and beast, if the books do say it. They'll keep in this cool, dark cellar longer than you'd think —longer than you'll let 'em, from the way they're disappearin'. I guess I'll try one."

"Certainly, a dozen, just as if they were still yours."

"They wasn't mine—they belonged to the Jamison estate. I'll help myself now quicker'n I would before. I might come it over a live man, you know, but not a dead one."

"I'd trust you with either."

While I was laughing at this phase of honesty, he resumed: "This is the kind of place to keep apples—cool, dry, dark, even temperature. Why, they're as crisp and juicy as if just off the trees. I came over to make a suggestion. There's a lot of sugar-maple trees on your place, down by the brook. Why not tap 'em, and set a couple of pots b'ilin' over your open fire? You'd kill two birds with one stone; the fire'd keep you warm, and make a lot of sugar in the bargain. I opinion, too, the children would like the fun."

They were already shouting over the idea, but I said dubiously, "How about the pails to catch the sap?"

"Well," said Mr. Jones, "I've thought of that. We've a lot of spare milk-pails and pans, that we're not usin'. Junior understands the business; and, as we're not very busy, he can help you and take his pay in sugar."

The subject of poultry was forgotten; and the children scampered off to the house to tell of this new project.

Before Mr. Jones and I left the basement, he said: "You don't want any partition here at present, only a few perches for the fowls. There's a fairish shed, you remember, in the upper barnyard, and when 'tain't very cold or stormy the cow will do well enough there from this out. The weather'll be growin' milder 'most every day, and in rough spells you can put her in here. Chickens won't do her any harm. Law sakes! when the main conditions is right, what's the use of havin' everything jes' so? It's more important to save your time and strength and money. You'll find enough to do without one stroke that ain't needful." Thus John Jones fulfilled his office of mentor.

CHAPTER XVIII

BUTTERNUTS AND BOBSEY'S PERIL

I RESTRAINED the children until after dinner, which my wife hastened. By that time Junior was on hand with a small wagon-load of pails and pans.

"Oh, dear, I wanted you to help me this afternoon," my wife had said, but, seeing the dismayed look on the children's faces, had added, "Well, there's no hurry, I suppose. We are comfortable, and we shall have stormy days when you can't be out."

I told her that she was wiser than the queen of Sheba and did not need to go to Solomon.

The horse was put in the barn, for he would have mired in the long spongy lane and the meadow which we must cross. So we decided to run the light wagon down by hand.

Junior had the auger with which to bore holes in the trees. "I tapped 'em last year, as old Mr. Jamison didn't care about doin' it," said the boy, "an' I b'iled the pot of sap down in the grove; but that was slow, cold work. I saved the little wooden troughs I used last year, and they are in one of the pails. I brought over a big kittle, too, which mother let me have, and if we can keep this and yours a-goin', we'll soon have some sugar.

Away we went, down the lane, Junior and Merton in the shafts, playing horses. I pushed in some places, and held back in others, while Winnie and Bobsey picked their way between puddles and quagmires. The snow was so nearly gone that it lay only on the northern slopes. We had heard the deep roar of the Moodna Creek all the morning, and had meant to go and see it right after breakfast; but providing a chicken-

home had proved a greater attraction to the children, and a better investment of time for me. Now from the top of the last hillside we saw a great flood rushing by with a hoarse, surging noise.

"Winnie, Bobsey, if you go near the water without me you march straight home," I cried.

They promised never to go, but I thought Bobsey protested a little too much. Away we went down the hill, skirting what was now a good-sized brook. I knew the trees, from a previous visit; and the maple, when once known, can be picked out anywhere, so genial, mellow, and generous an aspect has it, even when leafless.

The roar of the creek and the gurgle of the brook made genuine March music, and the children looked and acted as if there were nothing left to be desired. When Junior showed them a tree that appeared to be growing directly out of a flat rock, they expressed a wonder which no museum could have excited.

But scenery, and even rural marvels, could not keep their attention long. All were intent on sap and sugar, and Junior was speedily at work. The moment he broke the brittle, juicy bark, the tree's life-blood began to flow.

"See," he cried, "they are like cows wanting to be milked."

As fast as he inserted his little wooden troughs into the trees, we placed pails and pans under them, and began harvesting the first crop from our farm.

This was rather slow work, and to keep Winnie and Bobsey busy I told them they could gather sticks and leaves, pile them up at the foot of a rock on a dry hillside, and we would have a fire. I meanwhile picked up the dead branches that strewed the ground, and with my axe trimmed them for use in summer, when only a quick blaze would be needed to boil the supper kettle. To city-bred eyes wood seemed a rare luxury, and although there was enough lying about to supply us for a year, I could not get over the feeling that it must all be cared for.

To children there are few greater delights than that of building a fire in the woods, and on that cloudy, chilly day our blaze against the rock brought solid comfort to us all, even though the smoke did get into our eyes. Winnie and Bobsey, little bundles of energy that they were, seemed unwearied in feeding the flames, while Merton sought to hide his excitement by imitating Junior's stolid, business-like ways.

Finding him alone once, I said: "Merton, don't you remember saying to me once, 'I'd like to know what there is for a boy to do in this street'? Don't you think there's something for a boy to do on this farm?"

"O papa!" he cried, "I'm just trying to hold in. So much has happened, and I've had such a good time, that it seems as if I had been here a month; then again the hours pass like minutes. See, the sun is low already."

"It's all new and exciting now, Merton, but there will be long hours—yes, days and weeks—when you'll have to act like a man, and to do work because it ought to be done and must be done."

"The same would be true if we stayed in town," he said.

Soon I decided that it was time for the younger children to return, for I meant to give my wife all the help I could before bedtime. We first hauled the wagon back, and then Merton said he would bring what sap had been caught. Junior had to go home for a time to do his evening "chores," but he promised to return before dark to help carry in the sap.

"There'll be frost to-night, and we'll get the biggest run in the morning," was his encouraging remark, as he made ready to depart.

Mrs. Jones had been over to see my wife, and they promised to become good friends. I set to work putting things in better shape, and bringing in a good pile of wood. Merton soon appeared with a brimming pail. A kettle was hung on the crane, but before the sap was placed over the fire all must taste it, just as it had been distilled by nature. And

all were quickly satisfied. Even Mousie said it was "too watery," and Winnie made a face as she exclaimed, "I declare, Merton, I believe you filled the pails from the brook!"

"Patience, youngsters; sap, as well as some other things, is better for boiling down."

"Oh what a remarkable truth!" said my wife, who never lost a chance to give me a little dig.

I laughed, and then stood still in the middle of the floor, lost in thought.

"A brown study! What theory have you struck now, Robert?"

"I was thinking how some women kept their husbands in love with them by being saucy. It's an odd way, and yet it seems effective."

"It depends upon the kind of sauce, Robert," she said with a knowing glance and a nod.

By the time it was dark, we had both the kettles boiling and bubbling over the fire, and fine music they made. With Junior for guest, we enjoyed our supper, which consisted principally of baked apples and milk.

"'Bubble, bubble,'
'Toil' and no 'trouble'—"

"Yet, worth speaking of," said my wife; "but it must come, I suppose."

"We won't go half-way to meet it, Winifred."

When the meal was over, Junior went out on the porch and returned with a mysterious sack.

"Butternuts!" he ejaculated.

Junior was winning his way truly, and in the children's eyes was already a good genius, as his father was in mine.

"O papa!" was the general cry, "can't we crack them on the hearth?"

"But you'll singe your very eyebrows off," I said.

"Mine's so white 'twouldn't matter," said Junior; "no-

body'd miss 'em. Give me a hammer, and I'll keep you goin'."

And he did, on one of the stones of the hearth, with such a lively rat-tat-snap! that it seemed a regular rhythm.

"Cracked in my life well-nigh on to fifty bushel, I guess," he explained, in answer to our wonder at his skill.

And so the evening passed, around the genial old fireplace; and before the children retired they smacked their lips over sirup sweet enough to satisfy them.

The following morning—Saturday—I vibrated between the sugar-camp and the barn and other out-buildings, giving, however, most of the time to the help of my wife in getting the house more to her mind, and in planning some work that would require a brief visit from a carpenter; for I felt that I must soon bestow nearly all my attention on the outdoor work. I managed to keep Bobsey under my eye for the most part, and in the afternoon I left him for only a few moments at the sugar-bush while I carried up some sap. A man called to see me on business, and I was detained. Knowing the little fellow's proneness to mischief, and forgetfulness of all commands, I at last hastened back with a half guilty and worried feeling.

I reached the brow of the hill just in time to see him throw a stick into the creek, lose his balance, and fall in.

With an exclamation of terror, his own cry forming a faint echo, I sprang forward frantically, but the swift current caught and bore him away.

CHAPTER XIX

JOHN JONES, JUN

MY agonized shout as I saw Bobsey swept away by the swollen current of the Moodna Creek was no more prompt than his own shrill scream. It so happened, or else a kind Providence so ordered it, that Junior was further down the stream, tapping a maple that had been overlooked the previous day. He sprang to his feet, whirled around in the direction of the little boy's cry, with the quickness of thought rushed to the bank and plunged in with a headlong leap like a Newfoundland dog. I paused, spellbound, to watch him, knowing that I was much too far away to be of aid, and that all now depended on the hardy country lad. He disappeared for a second beneath the tide, and then his swift strokes proved that he was a good swimmer. In a moment or two he caught up with Bobsey, for the current was too swift to permit the child to sink. Then, with a wisdom resulting from experience, he let the torrent carry him in a long slant toward the shore, for it would have been hopeless to try to stem the tide. Running as I never ran before, I followed, reached the bank where there was an eddy in the stream, sprang in up to my waist, seized them both as they approached and dragged them to solid ground. Merton and Winnie meanwhile stood near with white, scared faces.

Bobsey was conscious, although he had swallowed some water, and I was soon able to restore him, so that he could stand on his feet and cry: "I—I—I w-won't d-do so any—any more."

Instead of punishing him, which he evidently expected, I

clasped him to my heart with a nervous force that almost made him cry out with pain.

Junior, meanwhile, had coolly seated himself on a rock, emptied the water out of his shoes, and was tying them on again, at the same time striving with all his might to maintain a stolid composure under Winnie's grateful embraces and Merton's interrupting hand-shakings. But when, having become assured of Bobsey's safety, I rushed forward and embraced Junior in a transport of gratitude, his lip began to quiver and two great tears mingled with the water that was dripping from his hair. Suddenly he broke away, took to his heels, and ran toward his home, as if he had been caught in some mischief and the constable were after him. I believe that he would rather have had at once all the strappings his father had ever given him than to have cried in our presence.

I carried Bobsey home, and his mother, with many questionings and exclamations of thanksgiving, undressed the little fellow, wrapped him in flannel, and put him to bed, where he was soon sleeping as quietly as if nothing had happened.

Mrs. Jones came over, and we made her rubicund face beam and grow more round, if possible, as we all praised her boy. I returned with her, for I felt that I wished to thank Junior again and again. But he saw me coming, and slipped out at the back door. Indeed, the brave, bashful boy was shy of us for several days. When at last my wife got hold of him, and spoke to him in a manner natural to mothers, he pooh-poohed the whole affair.

"I've swum in that crick so often that it was nothin' to me. I only had to keep cool, and that was easy enough in snow water, and the swift current would keep us both up. I wish you wouldn't say anything more about it. It kinder makes me feel—I don't know how—all over, you know."

But Junior soon learned that we had adopted him into our inmost hearts, although he compelled us to show our good-will after his own off-hand fashion.

Sunday was ushered in with another storm, and we spent a long, quiet, restful day, our hearts full of thankfulness that the great sorrow, which might have darkened the beginning of our country life, had been so happily averted.

On Sunday night the wind veered around to the north, and on Monday morning the sky had a clear metallic hue and the ground was frozen hard. Bobsey had not taken cold, and was his former self, except that he was somewhat chastened in spirit and his bump of caution was larger. I was resolved that the day should witness a good beginning of our spring work, and told Winnie and Bobsey that they could help me. Junior, although he yet avoided the house, was ready enough to help Merton with the sap. Therefore soon after breakfast we all were busy.

Around old country places, especially where there has been some degree of neglect, much litter gathers. This was true of our new home and its surroundings. All through the garden were dry, unsightly weeds, about the house was shrubbery that had become tangled masses of unpruned growth, in the orchard the ground was strewn with fallen branches, and I could see dead limbs on many of the trees.

Therefore I said to my two little helpers: "Here in this open space in the garden we will begin our brush-pile, and we will bring to it all the refuse that we wish to burn. You see that we can make an immense heap, for the place is so far away from any buildings that, when the wind goes down, we can set the pile on fire in safety, and the ashes will do the garden good."

During the whole forenoon I pruned the shrubbery, and raked up the rubbish which the children carried by armfuls to our prospective bonfire. They soon wished to see the blaze, but I told them that the wind was too high, and that I did not propose to apply the match until we had a heap half as big as the house; that it might be several days before we should be ready, for I intended to have a tremendous fire.

Thus with the lesson of restraint was given the hope of

something wonderful. For a long time they were pleased with the novelty of the work, and then they wanted to do something else, but I said: "No, no; you are gardeners now, and I'm head gardener. You must both help me till dinner-time. After that you can do something else, or play if you choose; but each day, even Bobsey must do some steady work to earn his dinner. We didn't come to the country on a picnic, I can tell you. All must do their best to help make a living;" and so without scruple I kept my little squad busy, for the work was light, although it had become monotonous.

Mousie sometimes aided her mother, and again watched us from the window with great interest. I rigged upon the barrow a rack, in which I wheeled the rubbish gathered at a distance; and by the time my wife's mellow voice called, "Come to dinner"—how sweet her voice and summons were after long hours in the keen March wind!—we had a pile much higher than my head, and the place began to wear a tidy aspect.

Such appetites, such red cheeks and rosy noses as the outdoor workers brought to that plain meal! Mousie was much pleased with the promise that the bonfire should not be lighted until some still, mild day when she could go out and stand with me beside it.

Merton admitted that gathering the sap did not keep him busy more than half the time; so after dinner I gave him a hatchet, and told him to go on with the trimming out of the fallen branches in our wood lot—a task that I had begun —and to carry all wood heavy enough for our fireplace to a spot where it could be put into a wagon.

"Your next work, Merton, will be to collect all your refuse trimmings, and the brush lying about, into a few great heaps; and by and by we'll burn these, too, and gather up the ashes carefully, for I've read and heard all my life that there is nothing better for fruit then wood-ashes. Some day, I hope, we can begin to put money in the bank; for I intend to give all a chance to earn money for themselves, after they have done their share toward our general

effort to live and thrive. The next best thing to putting money in the bank is the gathering and saving of everything that will make the ground richer. In fact, all the papers and books that I've read this winter agree that as the farmer's land grows rich he grows rich."

CHAPTER XX

RASPBERRY LESSONS

IT must be remembered that I had spent all my leisure during the winter in reading and studying the problem of our country life. Therefore I knew that March was the best month for pruning trees, and I had gained a fairly correct idea how to do this work. Until within the last two or three years of his life, old Mr. Jamison had attended to this task quite thoroughly; and thus little was left for me beyond sawing away the boughs that had recently died, and cutting out the useless sprouts on the larger limbs. Before leaving the city I had provided myself with such tools as I was sure I should need; and finding a ladder under a shed, I attacked the trees vigorously. The wind had almost died out, and I knew I must make the most of all still days in this gusty month. After playing around for a time, Winnie and Bobsey concluded that gathering and piling up my prunings would be as good fun as anything else; and so I had helpers again.

By the middle of the afternoon Mr. Jones appeared, and I was glad to see him, for there were some kinds of work about which I wanted his advice. At one end of the garden were several rows of blackcap raspberry bushes, which had grown into an awful snarl. The old canes that had borne fruit the previous season were still standing, ragged and unsightly; the new stalks that would bear the coming season sprawled in every direction; and I had found that many tips of the branches had grown fast in the ground. I took my neighbor to see this briery wilderness, and asked his advice.

"Have you got a pair of pruning-nippers?" he asked.

Before going to the house to get them, I blew a shrill whistle to summon Merton, for I wished him also to hear all that Mr. Jones might say. I carried a little metallic whistle one blast on which was for Merton, two for Winnie, and three for Bobsey. When they heard this call they were to come as fast as their feet could carry them.

Taking the nippers, Mr. Jones snipped off from one-third to one-half the length of the branches from one of the bushes and cut out the old dead cane.

"I raise these berries myself for home use," he said; "and I can tell you they go nice with milk for a July supper. You see, after taking off so much from these long branches the canes stand straight up, and will be self-supporting, no matter how many berries they bear; but here and there's a bush that has grown slant-wise, or is broken off. Now, if I was you, I'd take a crow-bar 'n' make a hole 'longside these weakly and slantin' fellers, put in a stake, and tie 'em up strong. Then, soon as the frost yields, if you'll get out the grass and weeds that's started among 'em, you'll have a dozen bushel or more of marketable berries from this 'ere wilderness, as you call it. Give Merton a pair of old gloves, and he can do most of the job. Every tip that's fast in the ground is a new plant. If you want to set out another patch, I'll show you how later on."

"I think I know pretty nearly how to do that."

"Yes, yes, I know. Books are a help, I s'pose, but after you've seen one plant set out right, you'll know more than if you'd 'a' read a month."

"Well, now that you're here, Mr. Jones, I'm going to make the most of you. How about those other raspberries off to the southeast of the house?"

"Those are red ones. Let's take a look at 'em."

Having reached the patch, we found almost as bad a tangle as in the blackcap patch, except that the canes were more upright in their growth and less full of spines or briers.

"It's plain enough," continued Mr. Jones, "that old man Jamison was too poorly to take much care of things last year. You see, these red raspberries grow different from those black ones yonder. Those increase by the tips of the branches takin' root; these by suckers. All these young shoots comin' up between the rows are suckers, and they ought to be dug out. As I said before, you can set them out somewhere else if you want to. Dig 'em up, you know; make a trench in some out-of-the-way place, and bury the roots till you want 'em. Like enough the neighbors will buy some if they know you have 'em to spare. Only be sure to cut these long canes back to within six inches of the ground."

"Yes," I said, "that's all just as I have read in the books."

"So much the better for the books, then. I haven't lived in this fruit-growin' region all my life without gettin' some ideas as to what's what. I give my mind to farmin'; but Jamison and I were great cronies, and I used to be over here every day or two, and so it's natural to keep comin'."

"That's my good luck."

"Well, p'raps it'll turn out so. Now Merton's just the right age to help you in all this work. Jamison, you see, grew these raspberries in a continuous bushy row; that is, say, three good strong canes every eighteen inches apart in the row, and the rows five feet apart, so he could run a horse-cultivator between. Are you catchin' on, Merton?"

"Yes, sir," said the boy, with much interest.

"Well, all these suckers and extra plants that are swampin' the ground are just as bad as weeds. Dig 'em all out, only don't disturb the roots of the bearin' canes you leave in the rows much."

"How about trimming these?" I asked.

"Well, that depends. If you want early fruit, you'll let 'em stand as they be; if you want big berries, you'll cut 'em back one-third. Let me see. Here's five rows of Highland Hardy; miserable poor-tastin' kind; but they come so early that they often pay the best. Let them stand with

their whole length of cane, and if you can scatter a good top-dressin' of fine manure scraped up from the barnyard, you'll make the berries larger. Those other rows of Cuthbert, Reliance, and Turner, cut back the canes one-third, and you'll get a great deal more fruit than if you left more wood on 'em. Cuttin' back'll make the berries big; and so they'll bring as much, p'raps, as if they were early."

"Well, Merton, this all accords with what I've read, only Mr. Jones makes it much clearer. I think we know how to go to work now, and surely there's plenty to do."

"Yes, indeed," resumed Mr. Jones; "and you'll soon find the work crowdin' you. Now come to the big raspberry patch back of the barn, the patch where the canes are all laid down, as I told you. These are Hudson River Antwerps. Most people have gone out of 'em, but Jamison held on, and he was makin' money on 'em. So may you. They are what we call tender, you see, and in November they must be bent down close to the ground and covered with earth, or else every cane would be dead from frost by spring. About the first week in April, if the weather's mild, you must uncover 'em, and tie 'em to stakes durin' the month."

"Now, Mr. Jones, one other good turn and we won't bother you any more to-day. All the front of the house is covered by two big grape-vines that have not been trimmed, and there are a great many other vines on the place. I've read and read on the subject, but I declare I'm afraid to touch them."

"Now, you're beyond my depth. I've got a lot of vines home, and I trim 'em in my rough way, but I know I ain't scientific, and we have pretty poor, scraggly bunches. They taste just as good, though, and I don't raise any to sell. There's a clever man down near the landin' who has a big vineyard, and he's trimmed it as your vines ought to have been long ago. I'd advise you to go and see him, and he can show you all the latest wrinkles in prunin'. Now, I'll tell you what I come for, in the first place. You'll remember that I said there'd be a vandoo to-morrow. I've been over and

looked at the stock offered. There's a lot of chickens, as I told you; a likely-looking cow with a calf at her side; a fairish and quiet old horse that ought to go cheap, but he'd answer well the first year. Do you think you'll get more'n one horse to start with?"

"No; you said I could hire such heavy plowing as was needed at a moderate sum, and I think we can get along with one horse for a time. My plan is to go slow, and, I hope, sure."

"That's the best way, only it ain't common. I'll be around in the mornin' for you and such of the children as you'll take."

"On one condition, Mr. Jones. You must let me pay you for your time and trouble. Unless you'll do this in giving me my start, I'll have to paddle my own canoe, even if I sink it."

"Oh, I've no grudge against an honest penny turned in any way that comes handy. You and I can keep square as we go along. You can give me what you think is right, and if I ain't satisfied, I'll say so."

I soon learned that my neighbor had no foolish sensitiveness. I could pay him what I thought the value of his services, and he pocketed the money without a word. Of course, I could not pay him what his advice was really worth, for his hard common-sense stood me in good stead in many ways.

CHAPTER XXI

THE "VANDOO"

THE next morning at about eight o'clock Mr. Jones arrived in a long farm-wagon on springs, with one seat in it; but Junior had half filled its body with straw, and he said to Merton, "I thought that p'raps, if you and the children could go, you'd like a straw-ride."

The solemnity with which Winnie and Bobsey promised to obey orders gave some hope of performance; so I tossed them into the straw, and we drove away, a merry party, leaving Mousie consoled with the hope of receiving something from the vendue.

"There's allers changes and breakin's up in the spring," said Mr. Jones, as we drove along; "and this family's goin' out West. Everything is to be sold, in doors and out."

The farmhouse in question was about two miles away. By the time we arrived, all sorts of vehicles were converging to it on the muddy roads, for the weather had become mild again. Stylish-looking people drove up in top-buggies, and there were many heavy, springless wagons driven by rusty-looking countrymen, whose trousers were thrust into the top of their cowhide boots. I strolled through the house before the sale began, thinking that I might find something there which would please Mousie and my wife. The rooms were already half filled with the housewives from the vicinity; red-faced Irish women, who stalked about and examined everything with great freedom; placid, peach-cheeked dames in Quaker bonnets, who softly cooed together, and took every chance they could to say pleasant

words to the flurried, nervous family that was being thrust out into the world, as it were, while still at their own hearth.

I marked with my eye a low, easy sewing-chair for my wife, and a rose geranium, full of bloom, for Mousie, purposing to bid on them. I also observed that Junior was examining several pots of flowers that stood in the large south window. Then giving Merton charge of the children, with directions not to lose sight of them a moment, I went to the barn-yard and stable, feeling that the day was a critical one in our fortunes. True enough, among the other stock there was a nice-looking cow with a calf, and Mr. Jones said she had Jersey blood in her veins. This meant rich, creamy milk. I thought the animal had a rather ugly eye, but this might be caused by anxiety for her calf, with so many strangers about. We also examined the old bay horse and a market wagon and harness. Then Mr. Jones and I drew apart and agreed upon the limit of his bids, for I proposed to act solely through him. Every one knew him and was aware that he would not go a cent beyond what a thing was worth. He had a word and a jest for all, and "How *are* YOU, JOHN?" greeted him wherever he went.

At ten o'clock the sale began. The auctioneer was a rustic humorist, who knew the practical value of a joke in his business. Aware of the foibles and characteristics of the people who flocked around and after him, he provoked many a ripple and roar of laughter by his telling hits and droll speeches. I found that my neighbor, Mr. Jones, came in for his full share, but he always sent back as good as he received. The sale, in fact, had the aspect of a country merry-making, at which all sorts and conditions of people met on common ground, Pat bidding against the best of the landed gentry, while boys and dogs innumerable played around and sometimes verged on serious quarrels.

Junior, I observed, left his mark before the day was over. He was standing, watching the sale with his usual impassive expression, when a big, hulking fellow leered into his face and cried,

"Tow-head, white-head,
Thick-head, go to bed."

The last word was scarcely out of his mouth before Junior's fist was between his eyes, and down he went.

"Want any more?" Junior coolly asked, as the fellow got up.

Evidently he didn't, for he slunk off, followed by jeers and laughter.

At noon there was an immense pot of coffee with crackers and cheese, placed on a table near the kitchen door, and we had a free lunch. To this Bobsey paid his respects so industriously that a great, gawky mountaineer looked down at him and said, with a grin, "I say, young 'un, you're gettin' outside of more fodder than any critter of your size I ever knowed."

"'Tain't your fodder," replied Bobsey, who had learned, in the streets, to be a little pert.

The day came to an end at last, and the cow and calf, the old bay horse, the wagon, and the harness were mine. On the whole, Mr. Jones had bought them at reasonable rates. He also bid in for me, at one dollar per pair, two cocks and twenty hens that looked fairly well in their coop.

For my part, I had secured the chair and blooming geranium. To my surprise, when the rest of the flowers were sold, Junior took part in the bidding for the first time, and, as a result, carried out to the wagon several other pots of house-plants.

"Why, Junior," I said, "I didn't know you had such an eye for beauty."

He blushed, but made no reply.

The chickens and the harness were put into Mr. Jones's conveyance, the wagon I had bought was tied on behind, and we jogged homeward, the children exulting over our new possessions. When I took in the geranium bush and put it on the table by the sunny kitchen window, Junior followed with an armful of his plants.

"They're for Mousie," he said; and before the delighted child could thank him, he darted out.

Indeed, it soon became evident that Mousie was Junior's favorite. She never said much to him, but she looked a great deal. To the little invalid girl he seemed the embodiment of strength and cleverness, and, perhaps because he was so strong, his sympathies went out toward the feeble child.

The coop of chickens was carried to the basement that we had made ready, and Winnie declared that she meant to "hear the first crow and get the first egg."

The next day the horse and the cow and calf were brought over, and we felt that we were fairly launched in our country life.

"You have a bigger family to look after outdoors than I have indoors," my wife said, laughingly.

I was not long in learning that some of my outdoor family were anything but amiable. The two cocks fought and fought until Junior, who had run over before night, showed Merton that by ducking their heads in cold water their belligerent spirit could be partially quenched. Then he proceeded to give me a lesson in milking. The calf was shut up away from the cow, which was driven into a corner, where she stood with signs of impatience while Junior, seated on a three-legged stool, essayed to obtain the nectar we all so dearly loved. At first he did not succeed very well.

"She won't let it down—she's keepin' it for the calf," said the boy. But at last she relented, and the white streams flowed. "Now," said Junior to me, "you see how I do it. You try."

As I took his place, I noticed that Brindle turned on me a vicious look. No doubt I was awkward and hurt her a little, also; for the first thing I knew the pail was in the air, I on my back, and Brindle bellowing around the yard, switching her tail, Junior and Merton meanwhile roaring with laughter. I got up in no amiable mood and said, roughly, to the boys, "Quit that nonsense."

But they couldn't obey, and at last I had to join in the laugh.

"Why, she's ugly as sin," said Junior. "I'll tell you what to do. Let her go with her calf now, and in the morning we'll drive her down to one of the stalls in the basement of the barn and fasten her by the head. Then we can milk her without risk. After her calf is gone she'll be a great deal tamer."

This plan was carried out, and it worked pretty well, although it was evident that, from some cause, the cow was wild and vicious. One of my theories is, that all animals can be subdued by kindness. Mr. Jones advised me to dispose of Brindle, but I determined to test my theory first. Several times a day I would go to the barn-yard and give her a carrot or a whisp of hay from my hand, and she gradually became accustomed to me, and would come at my call. A week later I sold her calf to a butcher, and for a few days she lowed and mourned deeply, to Mousie's great distress. But carrots consoled her, and within three weeks she would let me stroke her, and both Merton and I could milk her without trouble. I believe she had been treated harshly by her former owners.

CHAPTER XXII

EARLY APRIL GARDENING

SPRING was coming on apace, and we all made the most of every pleasant hour. The second day after the auction proved a fine one; and leaving Winnie and Merton in charge of the house, I took my wife, with Bobsey and Mousie, who was well bundled up, to see the scientific grape-grower, and to do some shopping. At the same time we assured ourselves that we were having a pleasure-drive; and it did me good to see how the mother and daughter, who had been kept indoors so long, enjoyed themselves. Mr. Jones was right. I received better and clearer ideas of vine-pruning in half an hour from studying work that had been properly done, and by asking questions of a practical man, than I could ever have obtained by reading. We found that the old bay horse jogged along, at as good a gait as we could expect, over the muddy road, and I was satisfied that he was quiet enough for my wife to drive him after she had learned how, and gained a little confidence. She held the reins as we drove home, and, in our own yard, I gave her some lessons in turning around, backing, etc.

"Some day," I said, "you shall have a carriage and a gay young horse."

When we sat down to supper, I was glad to see that a little color was dawning in Mousie's face.

The bundles we brought home supplemented our stores of needful articles, and our life began to take on a regular routine. The carpenter came and put up the shelves, and

made such changes as my wife desired; then he aided me in repairing the out-buildings. I finished pruning the trees, while Merton worked manfully at the raspberries, for we saw that this was a far more pressing task than gathering wood, which could be done to better advantage in the late autumn. Every morning Winnie and Bobsey were kept steadily busy in carrying our trimmings to the brush heap, which now began to assume vast proportions, especially as the refuse from the grape-vine and raspberry bushes was added to it. As the ground became settled after the frost was out, I began to set the stakes by the side of such raspberry canes as needed tying up; and here was a new light task for the two younger children. Bobsey's little arms could go around the canes and hold them close to the stake, while Winnie, a sturdy child, quickly tied them with a coarse, cheap string that I had bought for the purpose. Even my wife came out occasionally and helped us at this work. By the end of the last week in March I had all the fruit-trees fairly pruned and the grape-vines trimmed and tied up, and had given Merton much help among the raspberries. In shallow boxes of earth on the kitchen table, cabbage, lettuce, and tomato seeds were sprouting beside Mousie's plants. The little girl hailed with delight every yellowish green germ that appeared above the soil.

The hens had spent their first few days in inspecting their quarters and becoming familiar with them; but one morning there was a noisy cackle, and Winnie soon came rushing in with three fresh-laid eggs. A week later we had all we could use, and my wife began to put some by for the first brooding biddies to sit upon.

The first day of April promised to be unusually dry and warm, and I said at the breakfast table: "This is to be a great day. We'll prove that we are not April-fools by beginning our garden. I was satisfied yesterday that a certain warm slope was dry enough to dig and plant with hardy vegetables, and I've read and studied over and over again which to plant first, and how to plant them. I suppose I shall make

mistakes, but I wish you all to see how I do it, and then by next spring we shall have learned from experience how to do better. No doubt, some things might have been planted before, but we've all been too busy. Now, Merton, you go and harness old Bay to the cart I bought with the place, and I'll get out my treasure of seeds. Mousie, by ten o'clock, if the sun keeps out of the clouds, you can put on your rubbers and join us."

Soon all was bustle and excitement. Among my seeds were two quarts of red and two of white onion sets, or little bits of onions, which I had kept in a cool place, so that they should not sprout before their time. These I took out first. Then with Merton I went to the barn-yard and loaded up the cart with the finest and most decayed manure we could find, and this was dumped on the highest part of the slope that I meant to plant.

"Now, Merton, I guess you can get another load, while I spread this heap and begin to dig;" and he went off with the horse and cart, having an increased idea of his importance. I marked a long strip of the sunny slope, fifteen feet wide, and spread the manure evenly and thickly, for I had read, and my own sense confirmed the view, that a little ground well enriched would yield more than a good deal of poor land. I then dug till my back ached; and I found that it began to ache pretty soon, for I was not accustomed to such toil.

"After the first seeds are in," I muttered, "I'll have the rest of the garden plowed."

When I had dug down about four feet of the strip, I concluded to rest myself by a change of labor; so I took the rake and smoothed off the ground, stretched a garden line across it, and, with a sharp-pointed hoe, made a shallow trench, or drill.

"Now, Winnie and Bobsey," I said, "it is time for you to do your part. Just stick these little onions in the trench about four inches apart;" and I gave each of them a little stick of the right length to measure the distance; for they

had vague ideas of four inches. "Be sure," I continued, "that you get the bottom of the onion down. This is the top, and this is the bottom. Press the onion in the soil just enough to make it stand firm, so. That's right. Oh, you're learning fast. Now I can rest, you see, while you do the planting."

In a few moments they had stuck the fifteen feet of shallow trench, or drill, full of onions, which I covered with earth, packing it lightly with my hoe. I then moved the line fourteen inches further down and made another shallow drill. In this way we soon had all the onion sets in the ground. Merton came back with his load in time to see how it was done, and nodded his head approvingly. I now felt rested enough to dig awhile, and Merton started off to the barn-yard again. We next sowed, in even shallower drills, the little onion seed that looked like gunpowder, for my garden book said that the earlier this was planted the better. We had completed only a few rows when Mr. Jones appeared, and said: "Plantin' onions here? Why, neighbor, this ground is too dry and light for onions."

"Is it? Well, I knew I'd make mistakes. I haven't used near all my onion seed yet, however."

"Oh, well, no great harm's done. You've made the ground rich, and, if we have a moist season, like enough they'll do well. P'raps it's the best thing, after all, 'specially if you've put in the seed thick, as most people do. Let 'em all grow, and you'll have a lot of little onions, or sets, of your own raisin' to plant early next spring. Save the rest of your seed until you have some rich, strong, deep soil ready. I came over to say that if this weather holds a day or two longer I'll plow the garden; and I thought I'd tell you, so that you might get ready for me. The sooner you get your early pertaters in the better."

"Your words almost take the ache out of my back," I said. "I fear we shouldn't have much of a garden if I had to dig it all, but I thought I'd make a beginning with a few early vegetables."

"That's well enough, but a plow beats a fork all hollow. You'll know what I mean when you see my plow going down to the beam and loosenin' the ground from fifteen to twenty inches. So burn your big brush-pile, and get out what manure you're goin' to put in the garden, and I'll be ready when you are."

"All right. Thank you. I'll just plant some radishes, peas, and beans."

"Not beans yet, Mr. Durham. Don't put those in till the last of the month, and plant them very shallow when you do."

"How one forgets when there's not much experience to fall back upon! I now remember that my book said that beans, in this latitude, should not be planted until about the 1st of May."

"And lima beans not till the 10th of May," added Mr. Jones. "You might put in a few early beets here, although the ground is rather light for 'em. You could put your main crop somewhere else. Well, let me know when you're ready. Junior and me are drivin' things, too, this mornin';" and he stalked away, whistling a hymn-tune in rather lively time.

I said: "Youngsters, I think I'll get my garden book and be sure I'm right about sowing the radish and beet seed and the peas. Mr. Jones has rather shaken my confidence."

When Merton came with the next load I told him that he could put the horse in the stable and help us. As a result, we soon had several rows of radishes and beets sown, fourteen inches apart. We planted the seed only an inch deep, and packed the ground lightly over it. Mousie, to her great delight, was allowed to drop a few of the seeds. Merton was ambitious to take the fork, but I soon stopped him, and said: "Digging is too heavy work for you, my boy. There is enough that you can do without overtaxing yourself. We must all act like good soldiers. The campaign of work is just opening, and it would be very foolish for any of us to disable ourselves at the start. We'll plant only half a dozen

rows of these dwarf peas this morning, and then this afternoon we'll have the bonfire and get ready for Mr. Jones's plow."

At the prospect of the bonfire the younger children set up shouts of exultation, which cheered me on as I turned over the soil with the fork, although often stopping to rest. My back ached, but my heart was light. In my daily work now I had all my children about me, and their smaller hands were helping in the most practical way. Their voices were as joyous as the notes of the robins, song-sparrows, and bluebirds that were singing all about us. A soft haze half obscured the mountains, and mellowed the sunshine. From the springing grass and fresh-turned soil came odors sweet as those which made Eden fragrant after "a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground."

All the children helped to plant the peas, which we placed carefully and evenly, an inch apart, in the row, and covered with two inches of soil, the rows being two feet distant one from another. I had decided to plant chiefly McLean's Little Gem, because they needed no stakes or brush for support. We were almost through our task when, happening to look toward the house, I saw my wife standing in the doorway, a framed picture.

"Dinner," she called, in a voice as sweet to me as that of the robin singing in the cherry-tree over her head.

The children stampeded for the house, Winnie crying: "Hurry up, mamma, for right after dinner papa will set the great brush-pile on fire, and we're going to dance round it like Indians. You must come out, too."

CHAPTER XXIII

A BONFIRE AND A FEAST

IT amused and interested me to see upon the children's faces such an eager expectancy as they hurried through our midday meal. Nothing greater than a bonfire was in prospect, yet few costly pleasures could have afforded them such excitement. I found myself sharing in their anticipation to a degree that surprised me, and was led to ask myself why it is that outdoor pursuits often take so strong a hold upon the fancy. I recalled traits shown by one of my former employers. He was a gray-headed man, possessing great wealth and an elegant city home, while his mind was occupied by a vast and complicated business. When he learned that I was going to the country, he would often come to me, and, with kindling eyes and animated tones, talk of his chickens, cows, fruit-trees and crops. He proved that the best product of his farm was the zest it brought him into his life—a zest that was failing in his other occupations and interests. What was true of him I knew to be equally so of many others to whom wealth brings no greater luxury than the ability to indulge in expensive farming. A lifetime in the city does not destroy the primal instinct which leads men to the soil nor does a handsome dividend from stocks give the unalloyed pleasure awakened by a basket of fresh eggs or fruit. This love of the earth is not earthiness, but has been the characteristic of the best and greatest minds. Washington would turn from the anxieties of a campaign and the burdens of state to read, with absorbing interest, the reports of the

agent who managed his plantation, and to write out the minutest details for the overseer's guidance.

In my limited way and sphere I was under the influence of the same impulses; and, as I looked around the table at those so dear to me, I felt that I had far more at stake. I had not come back to Nature merely to amuse myself or to gratify a taste, but to co-work with her in fulfilling the most sacred duties. With the crops of the coming years these children must be nourished and fitted for their part in life, and I felt that all my faculties must be employed to produce the best results from my open-air toil.

Therefore, why should not I also be interested in the prospective bonfire? It would transmute the unsightly rubbish of the place into fertilizing ashes, and clear the ground for the plow. The mellow soil would produce that which would give brain and muscle—life to those whose lives were dear.

He who spreads his table with food secured by his own hands direct from nature should feel a strong incentive to do his best. The coarse, unvaried diet, common to many farmers' homes, is the result of stolid minds and plodding ways. A better manhood and womanhood will be developed when we act upon the truth that varied and healthful sustenance improves blood and brain, and therefore character.

I was growing abstracted, when my wife remarked, "Robert, will you deign to come back from a remote region of thought and take some rice pudding?"

"You may all fare the better for my thoughts," I replied.

The children, however, were bolting their pudding at railroad speed, and I perceived that the time demanded action. Winnie and Bobsey wished me to light the fire at once, but I said: "No, not till mamma and Mousie are ready to come out. You must stay and help them clear away the things. When all is ready, you two shall start the blaze."

Very soon we were all at the brush-pile, which towered above our heads, and I said: "Merton, it will burn better if

we climb over it and trample it down a little. It is too loose now. While we do this, Winnie and Bobsey can gather dry grass and weeds that will take fire quickly. Now which way is the wind?"

"There isn't any wind, papa," Merton replied.

"Let us see. Put your forefingers in your mouths, all of you, then hold them up and note which side feels the coolest."

"This side!" cried one and another.

"Yes; and this side is toward the west; therefore, Winnie, put the dry grass here on the western side of the heap, and what air is stirring will carry the blaze through the pile."

Little hands that trembled with eagerness soon held lighted matches to the dry grass; there was a yellow flicker in the sunshine, then a blaze, a crackle, a devouring rush of flames that mounted higher and higher until, with the surrounding column of smoke, there was a conflagration which, at night, would have alarmed the country-side. The children at first gazed with awe upon the scenes as they backed farther away from the increasing heat. Our beacon-fire drew Junior, who came bounding over the fences toward us; and soon he and Merton began to see how near they could dash in toward the blaze without being scorched. I soon stopped this.

"Show your courage, Merton, when there is need of it," I said. "Rash venturing is not bravery, but foolishness, and often costs people dear."

When the pile sank down into glowing embers, I turned to Bobsey, and added: "I have let you light a fire under my direction. Never think of doing anything of the kind without my permission, for if you do, you will certainly sit in a chair, facing the wall, all day long, with nothing to cheer you but bread and water and a sound whipping. There is one thing which you children must learn from the start, and that is, you can't play with fire except under my eyes."

At this direful threat Bobsey looked as grave as his

round little face permitted, and, with the memory of his peril in the creek fresh in mind, was ready enough with the most solemn promises. A circle of unburned brush was left around the embers. This I raked in on the hot coals, and soon all was consumed.

"Now I have a suggestion," cried my wife. "We'll have some roast potatoes, for here are lots of hot coals and ashes." Away scampered Winnie to the cellar for the tubers. Our bonfire ended in a feast, and then the ashes were spread far and wide. When the exciting events were past, Winnie and Bobsey amused themselves in other ways, Mousie venturing to stay with them while the sun remained high. Merton and I meanwhile put the horse to the cart and covered all the ground, especially the upper and poorer portions, with a good dressing from the barnyard.

In the evening Junior gave Merton a good hint about angle-worms. "Follow the plow," he said, "and pick 'em up and put 'em in a tight box. Then sink the box in a damp place and nearly fill it with fine earth, and you always have bait ready when you want to go a-fishing. After a few more warm days the fish will begin to bite first-rate."

Early the next morning Mr. Jones was on hand with his stout team, and, going twice in every furrow, he sunk his plow to the beam. "When you loosen the soil deep in this style," he said, "ye needn't be afraid of dry weather unless it's an amazin' long spell. Why, bless you, Mr. Durham, there's farmers around here who don't scratch their ground much deeper than an old hen would, and they're always groanin' over droughts. If I can get my plow down eighteen inches, and then find time to stir the surface often in the growin' season, I ain't afraid of a month of dry weather."

We followed Mr. Jones for a few turns around the garden, I inhaling the fresh wholesome odors of the soil with pleasure, and Merton and the two younger children picking up angle-worms.

Our neighbor soon paused and resumed: "I guess I'll give you a hint that'll add bushels of pertaters to yer crop.

After I've plowed the garden, I'll furrow out deep a lot of rows, three feet apart. Let Merton take a hoe and scrape up the fine old manure in the barnyard. Don't use any other kind. Then sprinkle it thickly in the furrows, and draw your hoe through 'em to mix the fertilizer well with the soil. Drop your seed then, eight inches apart in the row, and cover with four inches of dirt. One can't do this very handy by the acre, but I've known such treatment to double the crop and size of the pertaters in a garden or small patch."

I took the hint at once, and set Merton at work, saying that Winnie and Bobsey could gather all the worms he wanted. Then I went for a half-bushel of early potatoes, and Mr. Jones showed me how to cut them so as to leave at least two good "eyes" to each piece. Half an hour later it occurred to me to see how Merton was getting on. I found him perspiring, and almost panting with fatigue, and my conscience smote me. "There, my boy," I said, "this is too hard work for you. Come with me and I'll show you how to cut the potatoes. But first go into the house, and cool off while you drink a glass of milk."

"Well, papa," he replied, gratefully, "I wouldn't mind a change like that. I didn't want you to think I was shirking, but, to tell the truth, I was getting played out."

"Worked out, you mean. It's not my wish that you should ever be either played or worked out, nor will you if you take play and work in the right degree. Remember," I added, seriously, "that you are a growing boy, and it's not my intention to put you at anything beyond your strength. If, in my inexperience, I do give you too hard work, tell me at once. There's plenty to do that won't overtax you."

So we exchanged labors, and by the time the garden was plowed and the furrows were made I had scraped up enough fine material in the barnyard to give my tubers a great start. I varied my labor with lessons in plowing, for running in my head was an "old saw" to the effect that "he who would thrive must both hold the plow and drive."

The fine weather lasted long enough for us to plant

our early potatoes in the most approved fashion, and then came a series of cold, wet days and frosty nights. Mr. Jones assured us that the vegetable seeds already in the ground would receive no harm. At such times as were suitable for work we finished trimming and tying up the hardy raspberries, cleaning up the barnyard, and carting all the fertilizers we could find to the land that we meant to cultivate.

CHAPTER XXIV

"NO BLIND DRIFTING"

ONE long, stormy day I prepared an account-book. On its left-hand pages I entered the cost of the place and all expenses thus far incurred. The right-hand pages were for records of income, as yet small indeed. They consisted only of the proceeds from the sale of the calf, the eggs that Winnie gathered, and the milk measured each day, all valued at the market price. I was resolved that there should be no blind drifting toward the breakers of failure—that at the end of the year we should know whether we had made progress, stood still, or gone backward. My system of keeping the accounts was so simple that I easily explained it to my wife, Merton, and Mousie, for I believed that, if they followed the effort at country living understandingly, they would be more willing to practice the self-denial necessary for success. Indeed, I had Merton write out most of the items, even though the record, as a result, was not very neat. I stopped his worrying over blots and errors, by saying, "You are of more account than the account-book, and will learn by practice to be as accurate as any one."

My wife and Mousie also started another book of household expenses, that we might always know just where we stood and what our prospects were.

Weeks would elapse before our place would be food-producing to any great extent. In the meantime we must draw chiefly on our capital in order to live. Winifred and I resolved to meet this necessity in no careless way, feeling

that not a penny should be spent which might be saved. The fact that I had only my family to support was greatly in our favor. There was no kitchen cabinet, that ate much and wasted more, to satisfy. Therefore, our revenue of eggs and milk went a long way toward meeting the problem. We made out a list of cheap, yet wholesome, articles of food, and found that we could buy oatmeal at four cents per pound, Indian meal at two and a half cents, rice at eight cents, samp at four, mackerel at nine, pork at twelve, and ham at fifteen cents. The last two articles were used sparingly, and more as relishes and for flavoring than as food. Flour happened to be cheap at the time, the best costing but seven dollars a barrel; of vegetables, we had secured abundance at slight cost; and the apples still added the wholesome element of fruit. A butcher drove his wagon to our door three times a week and, for cash, would give us, at very reasonable rates, certain cuts of beef and mutton. These my wife conjured into appetizing dishes and delicious soups.

Thus it can be seen that we had a varied diet at a surprisingly small outlay. Such details may appear to some very homely, yet our health and success depended largely upon thoughtful attention to just such prosaic matters. The children were growing plump and ruddy at an expense less than would be incurred by one or two visits from a fashionable physician in the city.

In the matter of food, I also gave more thought to my wife's time and strength than to the little people's wishes. While we had variety and abundance, we did not have many dishes at any one meal.

"We shall not permit mamma to be over the hot range any more than is necessary," I said. "She and Mousie must give us, from day to day, what costs little in time as well as money."

Fortunately, plain, wholesome food does not require much time in preparation. There would be better health in many homes if there was more economy in labor. For instance, the children at first clamored for griddle-cakes, but

I said, "Isn't it nicer to have mamma sit down quietly with us at breakfast than to see her running back and forth from the hot stove?" and even Bobsey, though rather ruefully, voted against cakes, except on rare occasions.

The wash-tub I forbade utterly, and the services of a stout Irishwoman were secured for one day in the week. Thus, by a little management, my wife was not overtaxed. Indeed, she had so much leisure that she and Mousie began giving Winnie and Bobsey daily lessons, for we had decided that the children should not go to school until the coming autumn. Early in April, therefore, our country life was passing into a quiet routine, not burdensome, at least within doors; and I justly felt that if all were well in the citadel of home, the chances of the outdoor campaign were greatly improved.

CHAPTER XXV

OWLS AND ANTWERPS

EACH day at dawn, unless it was stormy, Merton patrolled the place with his gun, looking for hawks and other creatures which at this season he was permitted to shoot. He had quite as serious and important an air as if he were sallying forth to protect us from deadlier foes. For a time he saw nothing to fire at, since he had promised me not to shoot harmless birds. He always indulged himself, however, in one shot at a mark, and was becoming sure in his aim at stationary objects. One evening, however, when we were almost ready to retire, a strange sound startled us. At first it reminded me of the half-whining bark of a young dog, but the deep, guttural trill that followed convinced me that it was a screech-owl, for I remembered having heard these birds when a boy.

The moment I explained the sound, Merton darted for his gun, and my wife exclaimed: "O dear! what trouble is coming now? Mother always said that the hooting of an owl near a house was a bad omen."

I did not share in the superstition, although I disliked the uncanny sounds, and was under the impression that all owls, like hawks, should be destroyed. Therefore, I followed Merton out, hoping that he would get a successful shot at the night prowler.

The moonlight illumined everything with a soft, mild radiance; and the trees, with their tracery of bough and twig, stood out distinctly. Before we could discover the creature, it flew with noiseless wing from a maple near the door to another perch up the lane, and again uttered its weird notes.

Merton was away like a swift shadow, and, screening himself behind the fence, stole upon his game. A moment later the report rang out in the still night. It so happened that Merton had fired just as the bird was about to fly, and had only broken a wing. The owl fell to the ground, but led the boy a wild pursuit before he was captured. Merton's hands were bleeding when he brought the creature in. Unless prevented, it would strike savagely with its beak, and the motions of its head were as quick as lightning. It was, indeed, a strange captive, and the children looked at it in wondering and rather fearful curiosity. My wife, usually tender-hearted, wished the creature, so ill-omened in her eyes, to be killed at once, but I granted Merton's request that he might put it in a box and keep it alive for a while.

"In the morning," I said, "we will read all about it, and can examine it more carefully."

My wife yielded, and I am not sure but that she thought we might avert misfortune by showing mercy.

Among my purchases was a recent work on natural history. But our minds had been engrossed with too many practical questions to give it much attention. Next morning we consulted it, and found our captive variously described as the little red, the mottled, or the screech owl. Then followed an account of its character and habits. We learned that we had made war upon a useful friend, instead of an ill-boding, harmful creature. We were taught that this species is a destroyer of mice, beetles, and vermin, thus rendering the agriculturist great services, which, however are so little known that the bird is everywhere hunted down without mercy or justice.

"Surely, this is not true of all owls," I said, and by reading further we learned that the barred, or hoot owl, and the great horned owl, were deserving of a surer aim of Merton's gun. They prey not only upon useful game, but also invade the poultry-yard, the horned species being especially destructive. Instances were given in which these freebooters had killed every chicken upon a farm. As they hunt only

at night, they are hard to capture. Their notes and natures are said to be in keeping with their deeds of darkness; for their cry is wild, harsh, and unearthly, while in temper they are cowardly, savage, and untamable, showing no affection even for each other. A female has been known to kill and eat the male.

"The moral of this owl episode," I concluded, "is that we must learn to know our neighbors, be they birds, beasts, or human beings, before we judge them. This book is not only full of knowledge, but of information that is practical and useful. I move that we read up about the creatures in our vicinity. What do you say, Merton? wouldn't it be well to learn what to shoot, as well as how to shoot?"

Protecting his hands with buckskin gloves, the boy applied mutton suet to our wounded owl's wing. It was eventually healed, and the bird was given its liberty. It gradually became sprightly and tame, and sociable in the evening, affording the children and Junior much amusement.

By the 7th of April there was a prospect of warmer and more settled weather, and Mr. Jones told us to lose no time in uncovering our Antwerp raspberries. They had been bent down close to the ground the previous winter and covered with earth. To remove this without breaking the canes, required careful and skilful work. We soon acquired the knack, however, of pushing and throwing aside the soil, then lifting the canes gently through what remained, and shaking them clear.

"Be careful to level the ground evenly," Mr. Jones warned us, "for it won't do at all to leave hummocks of dirt around the hills;" and we followed his instructions.

The canes were left until a heavy shower of rain washed them clean; then Winnie and Bobsey tied them up. We gave steady and careful attention to the Antwerps, since they would be our main dependence for income. I also raked in around the hills of one row a liberal dressing of wood ashes, intending to note its effect.

CHAPTER XXVI

A COUNTRY SUNDAY

HITHERTO the Sabbaths had been stormy and the roads bad, and we had given the days to rest and family sociability. But at last there came a mild, sunny morning, and we resolved to find a church-home. I had heard that Dr. Lyman, who preached in the nearest village, had the faculty of keeping young people awake. Therefore we harnessed the old bay-horse to our market-wagon, donned our "go-ter-meetin's," as Junior called his Sunday clothes, and started. Whatever might be the result of the sermon, the drive promised to do us good. The tender young grass by the roadside, and the swelling buds of trees, gave forth delicious odors; a spring haze softened the outline of the mountains, and made them almost as beautiful as if clothed with foliage; robins, song-sparrows, and other birds were so tuneful that Mousie said she wished they might form the choir at the church. Indeed, the glad spirit of Spring was abroad, and it found its way into our hearts. We soon learned that it entered largely also into Dr. Lyman's sermon. We were not treated as strangers and intruders, but welcomed and shown to a pew in a way that made us feel at home. I discovered that I, too, should be kept awake and given much to think about. We remained until Sunday-school, which followed the service, was over, and then went home, feeling that life both here and hereafter was something to be thankful for. After dinner, without even taking the precaution of locking the door, we all strolled down the lane and the steeply sloping meadow to our wood lot and the banks of the

Moodna Creek. My wife had never seen this portion of our place before, and she was delighted with its wild beauty and seclusion. She shivered and turned a little pale, however, as she saw the stream, still high and swift, that had carried Bobsey away.

Junior joined us, and led the children to a sunny bank, from which soon came shouts of joy over the first wildflowers of the season. I placed my wife on a rock, and we sat quietly for a time, inhaling the fresh woody odors, and listening to the murmurs of the creek and the song of the birds. Then I asked: "Isn't this better than a city flat and a noisy street? Are not these birds pleasanter neighbors than the Daggetts and the Ricketts?"

Her glad smile was more eloquent than words could have been. Mousie came running to us, holding in her hand, which trembled from excitement, a little bunch of liverworts and anemones. Tears of happiness actually stood in her eyes, and she could only falter, "O mamma! just look!" and then she hastened away to gather more.

"That child belongs to nature," I said, "and would always be an exile in the city. How greatly she has improved in health already!"

The air grew damp and chill early, and we soon returned to the house. Monday was again fair, and found us absorbed in our busy life, each one having plenty to do. When it was safe to uncover the raspberries, Merton and I had not lost a moment in the task. At the time of which I write we put in stakes where they were missing, obtaining not a few of them from the wood lot. We also made our second planting of potatoes and other hardy vegetables in the garden. The plants in the kitchen window were thriving, and during mild, still days we carried them to a sheltered place without, that they might become inured to the open air.

Winnie already had three hens sitting on their nests full of eggs, and she was counting the days until the three weeks of incubation should expire, and the little chicks break their shells. One of the hens proved a fickle biddy, and left her

nest, much to the child's anger and disgust. But the others were faithful, and one morning Winnie came bounding in, saying she had heard the first "peep." I told her to be patient and leave the brood until the following day, since I had read that the chicks were stronger for not being taken from the nest too soon. She had treated the mother hens so kindly that they were tame, and permitted her to throw out the empty shells, and exult over each new-comer into a brief existence.

Our radishes had come up nicely; but no sooner had the first green leaves expanded than myriads of little flea-like beetles devoured them. A timely article in my horticultural paper explained that if little chickens were allowed to run in the garden they would soon destroy these and other insects. Therefore I improvised a coop by laying down a barrel near the radishes and driving stakes in front of it to confine the hen, which otherwise, with the best intentions, would have scratched up all my sprouting seeds. Hither we brought her the following day, with her downy brood of twelve, and they soon began to make themselves useful. Winnie fed them with Indian-meal and mashed potatoes and watched over them with more than their mother's solicitude, while Merton renewed his vigilance against hawks and other enemies.

With this new attraction, and wildflowers in the woods, the tying up of raspberries became weary prose to Winnie and Bobsey; but I kept them at it during most of the forenoon of every pleasant day and if they performed their task carelessly, I made them do it over. I knew that the time was coming when many kinds of work would cease to be play to us all, and that we might as well face the fact first as last. After the morning duties were over, and the afternoon lessons learned, there was plenty of time for play, and the two little people enjoyed it all the more.

Merton, also, had two afternoons in the week and he and Junior began to bring home strings of sweet little sunfish and winfish. Boys often become disgusted with country life because it is made hard and monotonous for them.

CHAPTER XXVII

STRAWBERRY VISIONS AND "PERTATERS"

I HAD decided that I would not set out any more raspberries until I had learned the comparative value of those already on the place. After I had seen my varieties in bearing and marketed the crop, I should be better able to make a wise selection. "Why not plant only the best and most profitable?" I reasoned. At Mr. Jones's suggestion I had put up notices at public resorts, and inserted a brief advertisement in a local paper, stating that I had plants for sale. As a result, I sold, at a low price, it is true, the greater part of the young plants that had been trenched in, and the ready money they brought was very acceptable.

From the first, my mind had often turned toward strawberries as one of our chief crops. They promised well for several reasons, the main one being that they would afford a light and useful form of labor for all the children. Even Bobsey could pick the fruit almost as well as any of us, for he had no long back to ache in getting down to it. The crop, also, could be gathered and sold before the raspberry season began, and this was an important fact. We should also have another and earlier source of income. I had read a great deal about the cultivation of the strawberry, and I had visited a Maizeville neighbor who grew them on a large scale, and had obtained his views. To make my knowledge more complete, I wrote to my Washington-Market friend, Mr. Bogart, and his prompt letter in reply was encouraging.

"Don't go into too many kinds," he advised, "and don't set too much ground. A few crates of fine berries will pay you better than bushels of small, soft, worthless trash. Steer clear of high-priced novelties and fancy sorts, and begin with

only those known to pay well in your region. Try Wilson's (they're good to sell if not to eat) and Duchess for early, and Sharpless and Champion for late. Set the last two kinds out side by side, for the Champions won't bear alone. A customer of mine runs on these four sorts. He gives them high culture, and gets big crops and big berries, which pay big. When you want crates, I can furnish them, and take my pay out of the sales of your fruit. Don't spend much money for plants. Buy a few of each kind, and set 'em in moist ground and let 'em run. By winter you'll have enough plants to cover your farm."

I found that I could buy these standard varieties in the vicinity; and having made the lower part of the garden very rich, I procured, one cloudy day, two hundred plants of each kind and set them in rows, six feet apart, so that by a little watchfulness I could keep them separate. I obtained my whole stock for five dollars; therefore, counting our time and everything, the cost of entering on strawberry culture was slight. A rainy night followed, and every plant started vigorously.

In spite of occasional frosts and cold rains, the days grew longer and warmer. The cherry, peach, plum, and pear buds were almost ready to burst into bloom, but Mr. Jones shook his head over the orchard.

"This ain't apple year," he said. "Well, no matter. If you can make it go this season, you will be sure of better luck next year."

He had come over to aid me in choosing a two-acre plot of ground for corn and potatoes. This we marked out from the upper and eastern slope of a large meadow. The grass was running out and growing weedy.

"It's time it was turned over," my neighbor remarked; "and by fall it'll be in good condition for fruit."

I proposed to extend my fruit area gradually, with good reason, fearing that much hired help would leave small profits.

That very afternoon Mr. Jones, with his sharp steel plow,

began to turn over clean, deep, even furrows; for we had selected the plot in view of the fact that it was not stony, as was the case with other portions of our little farm.

When at last the ground was plowed, he said: "I wouldn't harrow the part meant for corn till you are ready to plant it, say about the tenth of next month. We'd better get the pertater ground ready and the rows furrowed out right off. Early plantin' is the best. How much will ye give to 'em?"

"Half the plot," I said.

"Why, Mr. Durham, that's a big plantin' for pertaters."

"Well, I've a plan, and would like your opinion. If I put Early Rose potatoes right in, when can I harvest them?"

"Say the last of July or early August, accordin' to the season."

"If we keep the ground clean and well worked the sod will then be decayed, won't it?"

"Yes, nigh enough. Ye want to grow turnips or fodder corn, I s'pose?"

"No, I want to set out strawberries. I've read more about this fruit than any other, and, if the books are right, I can set strong plants on enriched ground early in August and get a good crop next June. Won't this pay better than planting next spring and waiting over two years from this time for a crop?"

"Of course it will, if you're right. I ain't up on strawberries."

"Well," I continued, "it looks reasonable. I shall have my young plants growing right here in my own garden. Merton and I can take them up in the cool of the evening and in wet weather, and they won't know they've been moved. I propose to get these early potatoes out of the ground as soon as possible, even if I have to sell part of them before they are fully ripe; then have the ground plowed deep and marked out for strawberries, put all the fertilizers I can scrape together in the rows and set the plants as fast as possible. I've read again and again that many growers regard this method as one of the best."

"Well, you're comin' on for a beginner. I'm kind o' shy of book-plans, though. But try it. I'll come over, as I used to when old man Jamison was here, and sit on the fence and make remarks."

Planting an acre of potatoes was no light task for us, even after the ground was plowed and harrowed, and the furrows for the rows were marked out. I also had to make a half-day's journey to the city of Newtown to buy more seed, since the children's appetites had greatly reduced the stock in the root-cellar. For a few days we worked like beavers. Even Winnie helped Merton to drop the seed; and in the evening we had regular potato-cutting "bees," Junior coming over to aid us, and my wife and Mousie helping also. Songs and stories enlivened these evening hours of labor. Indeed, my wife and Mousie performed, during the day, a large part of this task, and they soon learned to cut the tubers skilfully. I have since known this work to be done so carelessly that some pieces were cut without a single eye upon them. Of course, in such cases there is nothing to grow.

One Saturday night, the last of April, we exulted over the fact that our acre was planted and the seed well covered.

Many of the trees about the house, meantime, had clothed themselves with fragrant promises of fruit. All, especially Mousie, had been observant of the beautiful changes, and, busy as we had been, she, Winnie and Bobsey had been given time to keep our table well supplied with wildflowers. Now that they had come in abundance, they seemed as essential as our daily food. To a limited extent I permitted blooming sprays to be taken from the fruit-trees, thinking, with Mousie, that "cherry blossoms are almost as nice as cherries." Thus Nature graced our frugal board, and suggested that, as she accompanied her useful work with beauty and fragrance, so we also could lift our toilsome lives above the coarse and sordid phase too common in country homes.

CHAPTER XXVIII

CORN, COLOR, AND MUSIC

IN early May the grass was growing lush and strong, and Brindle was driven down the lane to the meadow, full of thickets, which bordered on the creek. Here she could supply herself with food and water until the late autumn.

With the first days of the month we planted, on a part of the garden slope, where the soil was dry and warm, very early, dwarf sweet corn, a second early variety, Burr's Mammoth, and Stowell's Evergreen.

"These several kinds," I said, "will give us a succession of boiling ears for weeks together. When this planting is up a few inches high, we will make another, for, by so doing, my garden book says we may have this delicious vegetable till frost comes."

After reading and some inquiry during the winter I had decided to buy only McLean's Gem peas for seed. This low-growing kind required no brush and, therefore, far less labor. By putting in a row every ten days till the last of June, we should enjoy green peas of the sweet, wrinkled sort till tired, if that were possible. We also planted early dwarf wax-beans, covering the seed, as directed, only two inches deep. It was my ambition to raise a large crop of Lima beans, having read that few vegetables yield more food to a small area than they. So, armed with an axe and a hatchet, Merton and I went into some young growth on the edge of our wood lot and cut thirty poles, lopping off the branches so as to leave little crotches on which the vines could rest

for support. Having sharpened these poles we set them firmly in the garden, four feet apart each way, then dug in some very fine and decayed manure around each pole, and left the soil for a day or two to grow warm and light. My book said that, if the earth was cold, wet, or heavy the beans would decay instead of coming up. The 10th of the month being fine and promising, I pressed the eye or germ side of the beans into the soil and covered them only one inch deep. In the evening we set out our cabbage and cauliflower plants where they should be allowed to mature. The tomato plants, being more tender than their companions started in the kitchen window, were set about four inches apart in a sheltered place. We could thus cover them at night and protect them a little from the midday sun for a week or two longer.

Nor were Mousie's flowering plants forgotten. She had watched over them from the seed with tireless care, and now we made a bed and helped the happy child to put her little nurslings in the open ground where they were to bloom. The apple-trees made the air fragrant, and some of the delicate pink of their blossoms was in Mousie's cheeks.

"Truly," I thought, as I looked into her sparkling eyes, "if we can but barely live in the country, I am glad we came."

The next morning Merton and I began our great undertaking—the planting of the other acre of ground, next to the potatoes, with field corn. Mr. Jones had harrowed it comparatively smooth. I had a light plow with which to mark out the furrows four feet apart each way. At the intersection of these furrows the seed was to be dropped. I found I could not drive our old bay straight across the field to save my life, and neighbor Jones laughed till his sides ached at the curves and crooks I first left behind me.

"Here, Merton," I cried, nothing daunted, "we must work together again. Get a pole and stand it on the farther side of the plot four feet in from the edge of the sod. That's right. Now come here; take old Bay by the head, and, with your eyes fixed on the pole, lead him steadily toward it."

A furrow was now made of which Mr. Jones himself

need not have been ashamed; and he laughed as he said, at parting "You'll do. I see you've got enough Yankee in you to try more ways than one."

We kept at work manfully, although the day was warm, and by noon the plot was furrowed one way. After dinner we took an hour's partial rest in shelling our corn and then resumed our work, and in the same manner began furrowing at right angles with the first rows. The hills were thus about four feet apart each way. Merton dropped the corn after we had run half a dozen furrows.

"Drop five kernels," I said; for Mr. Jones had told us that four stalks were enough and that three would do, but had added: "I plant five kernels, for some don't come up, and the crows and other vermints take others. If all of 'em grow, it's easier to pull up one stalk at the first hoeing than to plant over again."

We found that putting in the corn was a lighter task than planting the potatoes even though we did our own furrowing; and by the middle of May we were complacent over the fact that we had succeeded with our general spring work far better than we had hoped, remembering that we were novices who had to take so much counsel from books and from our kind, practical neighbor.

The foliage of the trees was now out in all its delicately shaded greenery, and midday often gave us a foretaste of summer heat. The slight blaze kindled in the old fireplace, after supper, was more for the sake of good cheer than for needed warmth, and at last it was dispensed with. Thrushes and other birds of richer and fuller song had come, and morning and evening we left the door open that we might enjoy the varied melody.

Our first plantings of potatoes and early vegetables were now up and looked promising. So a new phase of labor—that of cultivation—began. New broods of chickens were coming off, and Winnie had many families to look after. Nevertheless, although there was much to attend to, the season was bringing a short breathing-spell, and I resolved

to take advantage of it. So I said one Friday evening: "If to-morrow is fair, we'll take a vacation. What do you say to a day's fishing and sailing on the river?"

A jubilant shout greeted this proposal, and when it had subsided, Mousie asked, "Can't Junior go with us?"

"Certainly," I replied; "I'll go over right after supper, and make sure that his father consents."

Mr. Jones said, "Yes," and Merton and Junior were soon busy with their preparations, which were continued until the long twilight deepened into dusk.

CHAPTER XXIX

WE GO A-FISHING

THE following day, happily, proved all that we could desire. The children were up with the dawn, and Junior was not long in joining us. By eight o'clock we had finished breakfast and the morning work, our lunch-basket was packed, and the market-wagon stood at the door. Mr. Jones had good-naturedly promised to take a look at the premises occasionally to see that all was right. I had put but one seat in the wagon for my wife and myself, since the young people decided that a straw-ride to the river would be "more fun than a parlor-car."

My wife entered into the spirit of this little outing with a zest which gave me deep content. Her face indicated no regretful thoughts turning toward the Egypt of the city; her mother love was so strong that she was happy with the children. The robins, of which there seemed no end about the house, gave us a tuneful and hilarious send-off; the grown people and children whom we met smiled and cheered, following us with envious eyes. Each of the children held a pole aloft, and Merton said that "the wagon looked as if our Lima-bean patch was off on a visit."

In the village we increased our stock of lines and hooks, and bought a few corks for floats. We soon reached the mouth of the Moodna Creek, where stood a weather-beaten boat-house, with a stable adjoining, in which old Bay could enjoy himself in his quiet, prosaic way. A good-sized boat was hired, and, as the tide was in, we at first decided to go up the creek as far as possible and float down with the ebb.

This, to the children, was like a voyage of discovery, and there was a general airing of geography, each little bay, point, and gulf receiving some noted name. At last we reached a deep, shaded pool, which was eventually dubbed "Bobsey's Luck;" for he nearly fell into it in his eagerness to take off a minnow that had managed to fasten itself to his hook.

Merton and Junior, being more experienced anglers, went ashore to make some casts on the ripples and rapids of the stream above, and secured several fine "winfish." The rest of us were content to take it easy in the shade and hook an occasional cat and sun fish. At last the younger children wanted variety, so I permitted them to land on the wooded bank, kindle a little fire, and roast some clams that we had bought at the boat-house. The smoke and the tempting odors lured Merton and Junior, who soon proved that boys' appetites can always be depended upon.

Time passed rapidly, and I at last noticed that the tide had fallen to such a degree as to fill me with alarm.

"Come, youngsters," I cried, "we must go back at once, or we shall have to stay here till almost night."

They scrambled on board, and we started down-stream, but soon came to shallow water, as was proved by the swift current and the ripples. A moment later we were hard aground. In vain we pushed with the oars; the boat would not budge. Then Junior sat down and coolly began to take off shoes and stockings. In a flash Merton followed his example. There was no help for it, and we had no time to lose. Over they splashed, lightening the boat, and taking the "painter," or tie-rope, at the bow, they pulled manfully. Slowly at first, but with increasing progress, the keel grated over the stones, and at last we were again afloat. A round of applause greeted the boys as they sprung back into the boat, and away we went, cautiously avoiding shoals and sand-bars, until we reached Plum Point, where we expected to spend the remainder of the day. Here, for a time, we had excellent sport, and pulled up sunfish and white perch of a very fair size. Bobsey caught so large a specimen of the former

variety that he had provided himself with a supper equal even to his capacity.

The day ended in unalloyed pleasure, and never had the old farm-house looked so like home as when it greeted us again in the evening glow of the late spring sun. Merton and Junior divided the finny spoils to their satisfaction, while Winnie and I visited the chicken-coops and found that there had been no mishaps during our absence. I told my boy that I would milk the cow while he cleaned the fish for supper, and when at last we sat down we formed a tired, hilarious, and hungry group. Surely, if fish were created to be eaten, our enjoyment of their browned sweetness must have rounded out their existence completely.

"O papa!" exclaimed Merton, at the breakfast table, on Monday morning; "we haven't planted any musk and water melons!"

"That is true," I replied. "I find that I overlooked melons in making out my list of seeds. Indeed, I passed them over, I imagine, as a luxury that we could dispense with the first year."

"I'll take care of 'em if you will only let us have some," persisted the boy; and the other children joined in his request.

"But the garden is all filled up," I said, thoughtfully; "and I fear it is too late to plant now."

Looks of disappointment led me to think further and I got one of my seed catalogues.

"Here are some early kinds named and perhaps they would mature; but where shall we put them?"

"Seems to me we had better have a little less corn, if room can be made for melons," was Merton's suggestion.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," I continued. "We've had such good fortune in accomplishing our early work, and you have helped so nicely, that you shall try your hand at melons. Drive your mother and Mousie down to the village this morning, and get some seeds of the nutmeg musk-melon and Phinney's early watermelon. I'll take two rows in the

early corn on the warm garden slope, pull up every third hill, and make, in their places, nice, warm, rich beds for the seed which we will plant as soon as you come back. I don't believe the corn will shade the melon vines too much; and as soon as we have taken off the green ears we will cut away the stalks. Thus we shall get two crops from the same ground."

This plan was carried out, and the melon seed came up in a very promising way.

CHAPTER XXX

WEEDS AND WORKING FOR DEAR LIFE

THE beautiful transition period of spring passing into summer would have filled us with delight had we not found a hostile army advancing on us—annual weeds. When we planted the garden, the soil was brown and clean. The early vegetables came up in well-defined green rows, the weeds appearing with them, too few and scattered to cause anxiety. Now all was changed. Weeds seemed created by magic in a night. The garden was becoming evenly green throughout; and the vegetables, in some cases, could scarcely be distinguished from the ranker growth of crowding, unknown plants among and around them. I also saw that our corn and potato field would soon become, if left alone, as verdant as the meadow beyond. I began to fear that we could not cope with these myriads of foes, little now, but growing while we slept, and stealing a march on us in one part of the place while we destroyed them in another.

With something like dismay I called Mr. Jones's attention to these silent forces, invading, not only the garden and fields, but the raspberries and, indeed, all the ground now devoted to fruit.

He laughed and said: "The Philistines are on you, sure enough. I'm busy whackin' them over myself, but I guess I'll have to come and give you a lift, for you must get these weeds well under before hayin' and raspberry-pickin'-time comes. It's warm to-day, and the ground's middlin' dry. I'll show you what can be done in short metre. By the way, I'll give you a little wrinkle worth knowin'.

I've observed that you didn't bring the children to the country to be like weeds—just ter grow and run ter seed, ye know. It's 'stonishin' how soon weeds, whether they're people or pusley, get seedy. Well, now, call the children and come with me to the garden."

We were all soon there, including my wife, who shared my solicitude.

"You see," resumed Mr. Jones, "that these weakly little rows of carrots, beets, and onions would soon be choked by these weeds, not an inch high yet. The same is true of the corn and peas and other sass. The pertaters are strong enough to take care of themselves for a time, but not long. I see you and Merton have been tryin' to weed and hoe them out at the same time. Well, you can't keep up with the work in that way. Take now this bed of beets; the weeds are gettin' even all over it, and they're thicker, if anywhere, right in the row, so that it takes a good eye to see the beets. But here they are, and here they run across the bed. Now look at me. One good showin' is worth all the tellin' and readin' from now to Christmas. You see, I begin with my two hands, and pull out all the weeds on each side of the little row, and I pull 'em away from the young beets so as not to disturb them, but to leave 'em standin' straight and saucy. Careless hands will half pull out the vegetables at the same time with the weeds. I had to strap Junior once before he learned that fact, and it was amazin' how I helped his eyesight and trained his fingers through his back. Well, now, you see, I've cleared out this row of beets half across the bed and the ground for an inch or two on each side of it. I drop the weeds right down in the spaces between the rows, for the sun will dry 'em up before dinner-time. Now I'll take another row."

By this time Merton and I were following his example, and in a few moments a part of three more rows had been treated in the same way.

"Now," continued Mr. Jones, "the weeds are all out of the rows that we've done, and for a little space on each side

of 'em. The beets have a chance to grow unchoked, and to get ahead. These other little green varmints in the ground, between the rows, are too small to do any harm yet. Practically the beets are cleaned out, and will have all the ground they need to themselves for three or four days; but these weeds between the rows would soon swamp everything. Now, give me a hoe, and I'll fix *them.*"

He drew the useful tool carefully and evenly through the spaces between the rows, and our enemies were lying on their sides ready to wither away in the morning sun.

"You see after the rows are weeded out how quickly you can hoe the spaces between 'em," my neighbor concluded. "Now the children can do this weedin'. Your and Merton's time's too valyble. When weeds are pulled from right in and around vegetables, the rest can stand without harm for a while, till you can get around with the hoe and cultivator. This weedin' out business is 'specially important in rainy weather, for it only hurts ground to hoe or work it in wet, showery days, and the weeds don't mind it a bit. Warm, sunny spells, when the soil's a little dry, is the time to kill weeds. But you must be careful in weedin' then, or you'll so disturb the young, tender sass that it'll dry up, too. See, I'll pull some weeds carelessly. Now obsarve that the beets are half jerked up also. Of course that won't answer. I'll come over this afternoon with my cultivator, and we'll tackle the corn and pertaters, and make such a swath among these green Philistines that you'll sleep better to-night. But ye're goin' to come out right, mind, I tell ye so; and I've seen mor'n one city squash come to the country with the idee that they were goin' to beat us punkins all holler."

And he left us laughing and hopeful.

"Come, Winnie and Bobsey, begin here on each side of me. I'll show you this morning and then I trust you can be left to do the weeding carefully by yourselves to-morrow. Pressing as the work is, you shall have your afternoons until the berries are ripe."

"Can't I help, too?" asked Mousie.

I looked into her eager, wistful face, but said, firmly: "Not now, dear. The sun is too hot. Toward night, perhaps, I'll let you do a little. By helping mamma in the house you are doing your part."

We made good progress, and the two younger children speedily learned the knack of working carefully, so as not to disturb the little vegetables. I soon found that weeding was back-aching work for me, and therefore "spelled" myself by hoeing out the spaces between the rows. By the time the music of the dinner-bell sounded, hosts of our enemies were slain.

Mr. Jones, true to his promise, was on hand at one o'clock with his cultivator, and began with the corn, which was now a few inches high. Merton and I followed with hoes, uncovering the tender shoots on which earth had been thrown, and dressing out the soil into clean flat hills. As our neighbor had said, it was astonishing how much work the horse-cultivator performed in a short time. I saw that it would be wise for us, another year, to plant in a way that would permit the use of horse-power. Even in the garden this method should be followed as far as possible.

Mr. Jones was not a man of half-way measures. He remained helping us, till he had gone through the corn, once each way, twice between the long rows of potatoes, then twice through all the raspberry rows, giving us two full days of his time altogether.

I handed him a dollar in addition to his charge, saying that I had never paid out money with greater satisfaction.

"Well," he said, with a short, dry laugh, "I'll take it this time, for my work is sufferin' at home, but I didn't want you to get discouraged. Now, keep the hoes flyin', and you're ahead once more. Junior's at it early and late, I can tell ye."

"So I supposed, for we've missed him."

"Good reason. When I'm through with him he's ready enough to crawl into his little bed."

So were we for a few days, in our winning fight with the weeds. One hot afternoon, about three o'clock, I saw that Merton was growing pale, and beginning to lag, and I said, decidedly: "Do you see that tree there? Go and lie down under it till I call you."

"I guess I can stand it till night," he began, his pride a little touched.

"Obey orders! I am captain."

In five minutes he was fast asleep. I threw my coat over him, and sat down, proposing to have a half-hour's rest myself. My wife came out with a pitcher of cool butter-milk and nodded her head approvingly at us.

"Well, my thoughtful Eve," I said, "I find that our modern Eden will cost a great many back-aches."

"If you will only be prudent like this, you may save me a heart-ache. Robert, you are ambitious, and unused to this kind of work. Please don't ever be so foolish as to forget the comparative value of vegetables and yourselves. Honestly now" (with one of her saucy looks), "I'd rather do with a few bushels less, than do without you and Merton;" and she sat down and kept me idle for an hour.

Then Merton got up, saying that he felt as "fresh as if he had had a night's rest," and we accomplished more in the cool of the day than if we had kept doggedly at work.

I found that Winnie and Bobsey required rather different treatment. For a while they got on very well, but one morning I set them at a bed of parsnips about which I was particular. In the middle of the forenoon I went to the garden to see how they were getting on. Shouts of laughter made me fear that all was not well, and I soon discovered that they were throwing lumps of earth at each other. So absorbed were they in their untimely and mischievous fun that I was not noticed until I found Bobsey sitting plump on the vegetables, and the rows behind both the children very shabbily cleaned, not a few of the little plants having been pulled up with the weeds.

Without a word I marched them into the house, then

said: "Under arrest till night. Winnie, you go to your room. I shall strap Bobsey in his chair, and put him in the parlor by himself."

The exchange of the hot garden for the cool rooms seemed rather an agreeable punishment at first, although Winnie felt the disgrace somewhat. When, at dinner, nothing but a cup of water and a piece of dry bread was taken to them, Bobsey began to howl, and Winnie to look as if the affair was growing serious. Late in the afternoon, when she found that she was not to gather the eggs or feed her beloved chickens, she, too, broke down and sobbed that she "wouldn't do so any more." Bobsey also pleaded so piteously for release, and promised such saint-like behavior, that I said: "Well, I will remit the rest of your punishment and put you on trial. You had no excuse for your mischief this morning, for I allow you to play the greater part of every afternoon, while Merton must stand by me the whole of the week."

My touch of discipline brought up the morale of my little squad effectually for a time. The next afternoon even the memory of trouble was banished by the finding of the first wild strawberries. Exultation and universal interest prevailed as clusters of green and red berries were handed around to be smelled and examined. "Truly," my wife remarked, "even roses can scarcely equal the fragrance of the wild strawberry."

From that day forward, for weeks, it seemed as if we entered on a diet of strawberries and roses. The old-fashioned bushes of the latter, near the house, had been well trimmed, and gave large, fine buds in consequence, while Mousie, Winnie, and Bobsey gleaned every wild berry that could be found, beginning with the sunny upland slopes and following the aromatic fruit down to the cool, moist borders of the creek.

"Another year," I said, "I think you will be tired even of strawberries, for we shall have to pick early and late."

CHAPTER XXXI

NATURE SMILES AND HELPS

THE Saturday evening which brought us almost to the middle of June was welcomed indeed. The days preceding had been filled with hard, yet successful labor, and the weeds had been slaughtered by the million. The greater part of our crops had come up well and were growing nicely. In hoeing the corn, we had planted over the few missing hills, and now, like soldiers who had won the first great success of the campaign, we were in a mood to enjoy a rest to the utmost.

This rest seemed all the more delightful when we awoke on the following morning, to the soft patter of rain. The preceding days had been unusually dry and warm, so that the grass and tender vegetables were beginning to suffer. I was worrying about the raspberries also, which were passing out of blossom. The cultivator had been through them, and Merton and I, only the evening before, had finished hoeing out the sprouting weeds and surplus suckers. I had observed, with dread, that just as the fruit was forming, the earth, especially around the hills, was getting dry.

Now, looking out, I saw that the needful watering was not coming from a passing shower. The clouds were leaden from horizon to horizon; the rain fell with a gentle steadiness of a quiet summer storm, and had evidently been falling some hours already. The air was so fragrant that I threw wide open the door and windows. It was a true June incense, such as no art could distil, and when, at last, we all sat down to breakfast, of which crisp radishes taken a few

moments before from our own garden formed a part, we felt that nature was carrying on our work of the past week in a way that filled our hearts with gratitude. The air was so warm that we did not fear the dampness. The door and windows were left open that we might enjoy the delicious odors and listen to the musical patter of the rain, which fell so softly that the birds were quite as tuneful as on other days.

The children joined me in the porch, and my wife came out laughing, and put her hand on my shoulder as she said, "You are not through with July and August yet."

Mousie held her hands out in the warm rain, saying: "I feel as if it would make me grow, too. Look at the green cherries up there, bobbing as the drops hit them."

"Rain isn't good for chickens," Winnie remarked, doubtfully.

"It won't hurt them," I replied, "for I have fed them so well that they needn't go out in the wet for food."

The clouds gave us a more and more copious downfall as the day advanced, and I sat on the porch, resting and observing with conscious gratitude how beautifully nature was furthering all our labor, and fulfilling our hopes. This rain would greatly increase the hay-crops for the old horse and the cow; it would carry my vegetables rapidly toward maturity; and, best of all, would soak the raspberry ground so thoroughly that the fruit would be almost safe. What was true of our little plot was equally so of neighbor Jones's farm, and thousands of others. My wife sat with me much of the day, and I truly think that our thoughts were acceptable worship. By four in the afternoon the western horizon lightened, the clouds soon broke away, and the sun shone out briefly in undiminished splendor, turning the countless raindrops on foliage and grass into gems, literally, of the purest water. The bird-songs seemed almost ecstatic, and the voices of the children, permitted at last to go out of doors, vied with them in gladness.

"Let July and August—yes, and bleak January—bring

what they may," I said to my wife, "nevertheless, this is Eden."

In spite of the muddy walks, we picked our way around the garden, exclaiming in pleased wonder at the growth made by our vegetable nurslings in a few brief hours, while, across the field, the corn and potato rows showed green, strong outlines.

I found that Brindle in the pasture hadn't minded the rain, but only appeared the sleeker for it. When at last I came in to supper, I gave my wife a handful of berries, at which she and the children exclaimed. I had permitted a dozen plants of each variety of my garden strawberries to bear, that I might get some idea of the fruit. The blossoms on the other plants had been picked off as soon as they appeared, so that all the strength might go toward forming new plants. I found that a few of the berries of the two early kinds were ripe, also that the robins had been sampling them. In size, at least, they seemed wonderful compared with the wild fruit from the field, and I said:

"There will be lively times for us when we must get a dozen bushels a day, like these, off to Mr. Bogart."

The children, then, thought it would be the greatest fun in the world. By the time supper was over, Mr. Jones and Junior appeared, and my neighbor said in hearty good-will:

"You got your cultivatin' done in the nick of time, Mr. Durham. This rain is a good hundred dollars in your pocket and mine, too."

I soon perceived that our enemies, the weeds, had millions in reserve, and on Monday—the day after the rain—with all the children helping, even Mousie part of the time, we went at the garden again. To Mousie, scarcely an invalid any longer, was given the pleasure of picking the first green peas and shelling them for dinner. We had long been enjoying the succulent lettuce and the radishes, and now I said to Winnie: "To-morrow you can begin thinning out the beets, leaving the plants three inches apart. What you pull up can be cooked as spinach, or 'greens,' as country

people say. Our garden will soon enable us to live like princes."

As the ground dried after the rain, a light crust formed on the surface, and in the wetter portions it was even inclined to bake or crack. I was surprised at the almost magical effect of breaking up the crust and making the soil loose and mellow by cultivation. The letting in of air and light caused the plants to grow with wonderful vigor.

On Wednesday morning Merton came running in, exclaiming, "O papa! there's a green worm eating all the leaves off the currant and gooseberry bushes."

I followed him hastily, and found that considerable mischief had already been done, and I went to one of my fruit books in a hurry to find out how to cope with this new enemy.

As a result, I said: "Merton, mamma wishes to go to the village. You drive her and Mousie down, and at the drug-store get two pounds of white hellebore, also a pound of Paris green, for I find that the potato bugs are getting too thick to be managed by hand. Remember that these are poisons, the Paris green a deadly one. Have them carefully wrapped up, and keep them from everything else. When you return I'll take charge of them. Also, get a new large watering-can."

That afternoon I mixed a heaping tablespoonful of the hellebore through the contents of the watering-can, on which I had painted the word "Poison." With this infusion I sprinkled thoroughly every bush on which I could find a worm, and the next morning we had the pleasure of finding most of these enemies dead. But some escaped or new ones were hatched, and we found that we could save our currants only by constant vigilance. Every evening, until the fruit was nearly ripe, we went over the bushes, and gave the vile little pests a dose wherever we found them. Our other can I also labelled "Poison," with dashes under it to show that it was to be used for Paris green alone. A teaspoonful of this deadly agent was enough, according to my book, for

the amount of water held by the ordinary wooden pail. I kept this poison out of Bobsey's reach, and, indeed, where no one but myself could get at it, and, by its aid, destroyed the potato beetles and their larvæ also. Whatever may be true in other parts of the world, in our region, certainly, success can be secured only by prompt, intelligent effort.

CHAPTER XXXII

CHERRIES, BERRIES, AND BERRY-THIEVES

AN evening or two after this we were taught that not even in our retired nook had we escaped the dangers of city life. Winnie and Bobsey, in their rambles after strawberries, had met two other children, and, early in the acquaintance, fortunately brought them to the house. The moment I saw the strange girl, I recognized a rural type of Melissa Daggett, while the urchin of Bobsey's age did not scruple to use vile language in my hearing. I doubt whether the poor little savage had any better vernacular. I told them kindly but firmly that they must not come on the place again without my permission.

After supper I went over and asked Mr. Jones about these children, and he replied, significantly, looking around first to make sure that no one heard him:

"Mr. Durham, steer clear of those people. You know there are certain varmints on a farm to which we give a wide berth and kill 'em when we can. Of course we can't kill off this family, although a good contribution could be taken up any day to move 'em a hundred miles away. Still about everybody gives 'em a wide berth, and is civil to their faces. They'll rob you more or less, and you might as well make up your mind to it, and let 'em alone."

"Suppose I don't let them alone?"

"Well—remember, now, this is wholly between ourselves—there's been barns burned around here. Everybody's satisfied who sot 'em afire, but nothin' can be proved.

Your cow or horse, too, might suddenly die. There's no tellin' what accidents would happen if you got their ill-will."

"I can't take the course you suggest toward this family," I said, after a little thought. "It seems to me wrong on both sides. On one hand, they are treated as outlaws, and that would go far to make them such; on the other, they are permitted to levy a sort of blackmail and commit crime with impunity. Of course I must keep my children away from them; but, if the chance offers, I shall show the family kindness, and if they molest me I shall try to give them the law to the utmost."

"Well," concluded Mr. Jones, with a shrug, "I've warned you, if they git down on yer, yer'll find 'em snakes in the grass."

Returning home, I said nothing to Winnie and Bobsey against their recent companions, but told them that if they went with them again, or made the acquaintance of other strangers without permission, they would be put on bread and water for an entire day—that all such action was positively forbidden.

It was evident, however, that the Melissa Daggett element was present in the country, and in an aggravated form. That it was not next door, or, rather, in the next room, was the redeeming feature. Residents in the country are usually separated by wide spaces from evil association.

It must not be thought that my wife and children had no society except that afforded by Mr. Jones's family. They were gradually making pleasant and useful acquaintances, especially among those whom we met at church; but as these people have no material part in this simple history, they are not mentioned.

The most important activities of the season were now drawing very near. The cherries were swelling fast; the currants were growing red, and were already pronounced "nice for pies;" and one morning Merton came rushing in with a red raspberry from the Highland Hardy variety. I was glad the time was at hand when I should begin to re-

ceive something besides advice from Mr. Bogart; for, careful as we had been, the drain on my capital had been long and steady, and were eager for the turn of the tide.

I had bought a number of old Mr. Jamison's crates, had painted out his name and replaced it with mine. I now wrote to Mr. Bogart for packages best adapted to the shipping of cherries, currants, and raspberries. For the first he sent me baskets that held about a peck. These baskets were so cheap that they could be sold with the fruit. For currants, crates containing twenty-four quart baskets were forwarded. These, he wrote, would also do for black-caps this season, and for strawberries next year. For the red raspberries he sent me quite different crates, filled with little baskets holding only half a pint of fruit. Limited supplies of these packages were sent, for he said that a telegram would bring more the same day.

The corn and potatoes were becoming weedy again. This time I made use of a light plow, Merton leading old Bay as at first. Then, with our hoes, we gave the rows a final dressing out. By the time we had finished, some of our grass was fit to cut, the raspberries needed a careful picking over, and the cherries on one tree were ready for market. The children and robins had already feasted, but I was hungry for a check from New York.

I had long since decided not to attempt to carry on haying alone at this critical season, but had hired a man, too aged to hold his own among the harvesters on the neighboring farms. Mr. Jones had said of him: "He's a careful, trusty old fellow, who can do a good day's work yet if you don't hurry him. Most of your grass is in the meadow, some parts fit to cut before the others. Let the old man begin and mow what he can, every day. Then you won't have to cure and get in a great lot of hay all at once, and perhaps, too, when your raspberries most need pickin'."

So, during the last days of June, old Mr. Jacox, who came at moderate wages, put in his scythe on the uplands. I spread the grass and raked it up when dry, and, with the

aid of Merton and a rude, extemporized rack on the market-wagon, got the hay gradually into the barn. This labor took only part of the day; the rest of the time was employed in the garden and in picking fruit.

On the last day of June we gathered a crate of early raspberries and eight baskets of cherries. In the cool of the afternoon, these were placed in the wagon, and with my wife and the three younger children, I drove to the Maizeville Landing with our first shipment to Mr. Bogart.

"We are 'p'oducers,' at last, as Bobsey said," I cried, joyously. "And I trust that this small beginning will end in such big loads as will leave us no room for wife and children, but will eventually give them a carriage to ride in."

Merton remained on guard to watch our precious ripening fruit.

After our departure he began a vigilant patrol of the place, feeling much like a sentinel left on guard. About sun-down, he told me, as he was passing through the raspberry field, he thought he caught a glimpse of an old straw hat dodging down behind the bushes. He bounded toward the spot, a moment later confronting three children with tin pails. The two younger proved to be Winnie's objectionable acquaintances that I had told to keep off the place. The eldest was a boy, not far from Merton's age, and had justly won the name of being the worst boy in the region. All were the children of the dangerous neighbor against whom Mr. Jones had warned me.

The boy at first regarded Merton with a sullen, defiant look, while his brother and sister coolly continued to steal the fruit.

"Clear out," cried Merton. "We'll have you put in jail if you come here again."

"You shut up and clear out yerself," said the boy, threateningly, "or I'll break yer head. Yer pap's away, and we ain't afraid of you. What's more, we're goin' ter have some cherries before—"

Now Merton had a quick temper, and at this moment

sprang at the fellow who was adding insult to injury, so quickly that he got in a blow that blackened one of the thief's eyes.

Then they clinched, and, although his antagonist was the heavier, Merton thinks he could have whipped him had not the two younger marauders attacked him, tooth and nail, like cats. Finding himself getting the worst of it, he instinctively sent out a cry for his stanch friend Junior.

Fortunately, this ally was coming along the road toward our house, and he gave an answering halloo.

The vagrants, apparently, had a wholesome fear of John Jones, junior, for, on hearing his voice, they beat a hurried retreat; but knowing that no one was at the house, and in the spirit of revengeful mischief, they took their flight in that direction. Seeing Mousie's flower-bed, they ran and jumped upon that, breaking down half the plants, then dashed off through the coops, releasing the hens, and scattering the broods of chickens. Merton and Junior, who for a few moments had lost sight of the invaders in the thick raspberry bushes, were now in hot pursuit, and would have caught them again, had they not seen a man coming up the lane, accompanied by a big dog. Junior laid a hand on headlong Merton, whose blood was now at boiling heat, and said, "Stop."

CHAPTER XXXIII

GIVEN HIS CHOICE

JUNIOR had good reason for bringing Merton to a sudden halt in his impetuous and hostile advance. The man coming up the lane, with a savage dog, was the father of the ill-nurtured children. He had felt a little uneasy as to the results of their raid upon our fruit, and had walked across the fields to give them the encouragement of his presence, or to cover their retreat, which he now did effectually.

It took Junior but a moment to explain to my boy that they were no match "for the two brutes," as he expressed himself, adding, "The man is worse than the dog."

Merton, however, was almost reckless from anger and a sense of unprovoked wrong, and he darted into the house for his gun.

"See here, Merton," said Junior, firmly, "shoot the dog if they set him on us, but never fire at a human being. You'd better give me the gun; I am cooler than you are."

They had no occasion to use the weapon, however. The man shook his fist at them, while his children indulged in taunts and coarse derision. The dog, sharing their spirit and not their discretion, started for the boys, but was recalled, and our undesirable neighbors departed leisurely.

All this was related to me after nightfall, when I returned with my wife and younger children from the Maizeville Landing. I confess that I fully shared Merton's anger, although I listened quietly.

"You grow white, Robert, when you are angry," said

my wife. "I suppose that's the most dangerous kind of heat—white-heat. Don't take the matter so to heart. We can't risk getting the ill-will of these ugly people. You know what Mr. Jones said about them."

"This question shall be settled in twenty-four hours!" I replied. "That man and his family are the pest of the neighborhood, and everyone lives in a sort of abject dread of them. Now, the neighbors must say 'yes' or 'no' to the question whether we shall have decency, law, and order, or not. Merton, unharness the horse. Junior, come with me; I'm going to see your father."

I found Mr. Jones sleepy and about to retire, but his blue eyes were soon wide open, with an angry fire in them.

"You take the matter very quietly, Mr. Durham;" he said; "more quietly than I could."

"I shall not fume about the affair a moment. I prefer to act. The only question for you and the other neighbors to decide is, Will you act with me? I am going to this man Bagley's house to-morrow, to give him his choice. It's either decency and law-abiding on his part, now, or prosecution before the law on mine. You say that you are sure that he has burned barns, and made himself generally the terror of the region. Now, I won't live in a neighborhood infested by people little better than wild Indians. My feelings as a man will not permit me to submit to insult and injury. What's more, it's time the people about here abated this nuisance."

"You are right, Robert Durham!" said Mr. Jones, springing up and giving me his hand. "I've felt mean, and so have others, that we've allowed ourselves to be run over by this rapscallion. If you go to-morrow, I'll go with you, and so will Rollins. His hen-roost was robbed t'other night, and he tracked the thieves straight toward Bagley's house. He says his patience has given out. It only needs a leader to rouse the neighborhood, but it ain't very creditable to us that we let a new-comer like you face the thing first."

"Very well," I said, "it's for you and your neighbors to show now how much grit and manhood you have. I shall start for Bagley's house at nine to-morrow. Of course I shall be glad to have company, and if he sees that the people will not stand any more of his rascality, he'll be more apt to behave himself or else clear out."

"He'll have to do one or the other," said Mr. Jones, grimly. "I'll go right down to Rollins's. Come, Junior, we may want you."

At eight o'clock the next morning, a dozen men, including the constable, were in our yard. My wife whispered, "Do be prudent, Robert." She was much reassured, however, by the largeness of our force.

We soon reached the dilapidated hovel, and were so fortunate as to find Bagley and all his family at home. Although it was the busiest season, he was idle. As I led my forces straight toward the door, it was evident that he was surprised and disconcerted, in spite of his attempt to maintain a sullen and defiant aspect. I saw his evil eye resting on one and another of our group, as if he was storing up grudges to be well paid on future dark nights. His eldest son stood with the dog at the corner of the house, and as I approached, the cur, set on by the boy, came toward me with a stealthy step. I carried a heavy cane, and just as the brute was about to take me by the leg, I struck him a blow on the head that sent him howling away.

The man for a moment acted almost as if he had been struck himself. His bloated visage became inflamed, and he sprang toward me.

"Stop!" I thundered. My neighbors closed around me, and he instinctively drew back.

"Bagley," I cried, "look me in the eye." And he fixed upon me a gaze full of impotent anger. "Now," I resumed, "I wish you and your family to understand that you've come to the end of your rope. You must become decent, law-abiding people, like the rest of us, or we shall put you where you can't harm us. I, for one, am going to give you a last

chance. Your children were stealing my fruit last night, and acting shamefully afterward. You also trespassed, and you threatened these two boys; you are idle in the busiest time, and think you can live by plunder. Now, you and yours must turn the sharpest corner you ever saw. Your two eldest children can come and pick berries for me at the usual wages, if they obey my orders and behave themselves. One of the neighbors here says he'll give you work, if you try to do it well. If you accept these terms, I'll let the past go. If you don't, I'll have the constable arrest your boy at once, and I'll see that he gets the heaviest sentence the law allows, while if you or your children make any further trouble, I'll meet you promptly in every way the law permits. But, little as you deserve it, I am going to give you and your family one chance to reform, before proceeding against you. Only understand one thing, I am not afraid of you. I've had my say."

"I haven't had mine," said Rollins, stepping forward excitedly. "You, or your scapegrace boy there, robbed my hen-roost the other night, and you've robbed it before. There isn't a man in this region but believes that it was you who burned the barns and hay-stacks. We won't stand this nonsense another hour. You've got to come to my hay-fields and work out the price of those chickens, and after that I'll give you fair wages. But if there's any more trouble, we'll clean you out as we would a family of weasels."

"Yes, neighbor Bagley," added Mr. Jones, in his dry, caustic way, "think soberly. I hope you are sober. I'm not one of the threatenin', barkin' sort, but I've reached the p'int where I'll bite. The law will protect us, an' the hull neighborhood has resolved, with Mr. Durham here, that you and your children shall make no more trouble than he and his children. See?"

"Look-a-here," began the man, blusteringly, "you needn't come threatenin' in this blood-and-thunder style. The law'll protect me as well as—"

Ominous murmurs were arising from all my neighbors, and Mr. Jones now came out strong.

"Neighbors," he said, "keep cool. The time to act hasn't come yet. See here, Bagley, it's hayin' and harvest. Our time's vallyble, whether yours is or not. You kin have just three minutes to decide whether you'll take your oath to stop your maraudin' and that of your children;" and he pulled out his watch.

"Let me add my word," said a little man, stepping forward. "I own this house, and the rent is long overdue. Follow neighbor Jones's advice or we'll see that the sheriff puts your traps out in the middle of the road."

"Oh, of course," began Bagley. "What kin one feller do against a crowd?"

"Sw'ar, as I told you," said Mr. Jones, sharply and emphatically. "What do you mean by hangin' fire so? Do you s'pose this is child's play and make-believe? Don't ye know that when quiet, peaceable neighbors git riled up to our pitch, they mean what they say? Sw'ar, as I said, and be mighty sudden about it."

"Don't be a fool," added his wife, who stood trembling behind him. "Can't you see?"

"Very well, I sw'ar it," said the man, in some trepidation.

"Now, Bagley," said Mr. Jones, putting back his watch, "we want to convert you thoroughly this mornin'. The first bit of mischief that takes place in this borough will bring the weight of the law on you;" and, wheeling on his heel, he left the yard, followed by the others.

CHAPTER XXXIV

GIVEN A CHANCE

"COME in, Mr. Bagley," I said, "and bring the children. I want to talk with you all. Merton, you go home with Junior."

"But, papa—" he objected.

"Do as I bid you," I said, firmly, and I entered the squalid abode.

The man and the children followed me wonderingly. I sat down and looked the man steadily in the eye for a moment.

"Let us settle one thing first," I began. "Do you think I am afraid of you?"

"S'pose not, with sich backin' as yer got," was the somewhat nervous reply.

"I told Mr. Jones after I came home last night that I should fight this thing alone if no one stood by me. But you see that your neighbors have reached the limit of forbearance. Now, Mr. Bagley, I didn't remain to threaten you. There has been enough of that, and from very resolute, angry men, too. I wish to give you and yours a chance. You've come to a place where two roads branch; you must take one or the other. You can't help yourself. You and your children won't be allowed to steal or prowl about any more. That's settled. If you go away and begin the same wretched life elsewhere, you'll soon reach the same result; you and your son will be lodged in jail and put at hard labor. Would you not better make up your mind to work for yourself and family, like an honest man? Look at

these children. How are you bringing them up?— Take the road to the right. Do your level best, and I'll help you. I'll let bygones be bygones, and aid you in becoming a respectable citizen."

"Oh, Hank, do be a man, now that Mr. Durham gives you a chance," sobbed his wife; "you know we've been living badly."

"That's it, Bagley. These are the questions you must decide. If you'll try to be a man, I'll give you my hand to stand by you. My religion, such as it is, requires that I shall not let a man go wrong if I can help it. If you'll take the road to the right and do your level best, there's my hand."

The man showed his emotion by a slight tremor only, and after a moment's thoughtful hesitation he took my hand and said, in a hoarse, choking voice: "You've got a claim on me now which all the rest couldn't git, even if they put a rope around my neck. I s'pose I have lived like a brute, but I've been treated like one, too."

"If you'll do as I say, I'll guarantee that within six months you'll be receiving all the kindness that a self-respecting man wants," I answered.

Then, turning to his wife, I asked, "What have you in the house to eat?"

"Next to nothin'," she said, drying her eyes with her apron, and then throwing open their bare cupboard.

"Put on your coat, Bagley, and come with me," I said.

He and his wife began to be profuse with thanks.

"No, no!" I said, firmly. "I'm not going to give you a penny's worth of anything while you are able to earn a living. You shall have food at once; but I shall expect you to pay for it in work. I am going to treat you like a man and a woman, and not like beggars."

A few minutes later, some of the neighbors were much surprised to see Bagley and myself going up the road together.

My wife, Merton, and tender-hearted Mousie were at the head of the lane watching for me. Reassured, as we approached, they returned wonderingly to the house, and met us at the door.

"This is Mrs. Durham," I said. "My dear, please give Mr. Bagley ten pounds of flour and a piece of pork. After you've had your dinner, Mr. Bagley, I shall expect you, as we've agreed. And if you'll chain up that dog of yours, or, better still, knock it on the head with an axe, Mrs. Durham will go down and see your wife about fixing up your children."

Winifred gave me a pleased, intelligent look, and said, "Come in, Mr. Bagley;" while Merton and I hastened away to catch up with neglected work.

"Your husband's been good to me," said the man, abruptly.

"That's because he believes you are going to be good to yourself and your family," was her smiling reply.

"Will you come and see my wife?" he asked.

"Certainly, if I don't have to face your dog," replied Winifred.

"I'll kill the critter soon's I go home," muttered Bagley.

"It hardly pays to keep a big, useless dog," was my wife's practical comment.

In going to the cellar for the meat, she left him alone for a moment or two with Mousie; and he, under his new impulses, said: "Little gal, ef my children hurt your flowers agin, let me know, and I'll thrash 'em!"

The child stole to his side and gave him her hand, as she replied, "Try being kind to them."

Bagley went home with some new ideas under his tattered old hat. At half-past twelve he was on hand, ready for work.

"That dog that tried to bite ye is dead and buried," he said, "and I hope I buried some of my dog natur' with 'im,"

"You've shown your good sense. But I haven't time to talk now. The old man has mown a good deal of grass.

I want you to shake it out, and, as soon as he says it's dry enough, to rake it up. Toward night I'll be out with the wagon, and we'll stow all that's fit into the barn. To-morrow I want your two eldest children to come and pick berries."

"I'm in fer it, Mr. Durham. You've given me your hand, and I'll show yer how that goes furder with me than all the blood-and-thunder talk in Maizeville," said Bagley, with some feeling.

"Then you'll show that you can be a man like the rest of us," I said, as I hastened to our early dinner.

My wife beamed and nodded at me. "I'm not going to say anything to set you up too much," she said. "You are great on problems, and you are solving one even better than I hoped."

"It isn't solved yet," I replied. "We have only started Bagley and his people on the right road. It will require much patience and good management to keep them there. I rather think you'll have the hardest part of the problem yet on your hands. I have little time for problems now, however, except that of making the most of this season of rapid growth and harvest. I declare I'm almost bewildered when I see how much there is to be done on every side. Children, we must all act like soldiers in the middle of a fight. Every stroke must tell. Now, we'll hold a council of war, so as to make the most of the afternoon's work. Merton, how are the raspberries?"

"There are more ripe, papa, than I thought there would be."

"Then, Winnie, you and Bobsey must leave the weeding in the garden and help Merton pick berries this afternoon."

"As soon as it gets cooler," said my wife, "Mousie and I are going to pick, also."

"Very well," I agreed. "You can give us raspberries and milk to-night, and so you will be getting supper at the same time. Until the hay is ready to come in, I shall keep on hoeing in the garden, the weeds grow so rapidly. To-

morrow will be a regular fruit day all around, for there are two more cherry-trees that need picking."

Our short nooning over, we all went to our several tasks. The children were made to feel that now was the chance to win our bread for months to come, and that there must be no shirking. Mousie promised to clear away the things while my wife, protected by a large sun-shade, walked slowly down to the Bagley cottage. Having seen that Merton and his little squad were filling the baskets with raspberries properly, I went to the garden and slaughtered the weeds where they threatened to do the most harm.

At last I became so hot and wearied that I thought I would visit a distant part of the upland meadow, and see how Bagley was progressing. He was raking manfully, and had accomplished a fair amount of work, but it was evident that he was almost exhausted. He was not accustomed to hard work, and had rendered himself still more unfit for it by dissipation.

"See here, Bagley," I said, "you are doing well, but you will have to break yourself into harness gradually. I don't wish to be hard upon you. Lie down under this tree for half an hour, and by that time I shall be out with the wagon."

"Mr. Durham, you have the feelin's of a man for a feller," said Bagley, gratefully. "I'll make up the time arter it gets cooler."

Returning to the raspberry patch, I found Bobsey almost asleep, the berries often falling from his nerveless hands. Merton, meanwhile, with something of the spirit of a martinet, was spurring him to his task. I remembered that the little fellow had been busy since breakfast, and decided that he also, of my forces, should have a rest. He started up when he saw me coming through the bushes, and tried to pick with vigor again. As I took him up in my arms, he began, apprehensively, "Papa, I will pick faster, but I'm so tired!"

I reassured him with a kiss which left a decided rasp-

berry flavor on my lips, carried him into the barn, and, tossing him on a heap of hay, said, "Sleep there, my little man, till you are rested."

He was soon snoring blissfully, and when I reached the meadow with the wagon, Bagley was ready to help with the loading.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed, "a little breathin'-spell does do a feller good on a hot day."

"No doubt about it," I said. "So long as you are on the right road, it does no harm to sit down a bit, because when you start again it's in the right direction."

After we had piled on as much of a load as the rude, extemporized rack on my market wagon could hold, I added, "You needn't go to the barn with me, for I can pitch the hay into the mow. Rake up another load, if you feel able."

"Oh, I'm all right now," he protested.

By the time I had unloaded the hay, I found that my wife and Mousie were among the raspberries, and that the number of full, fragrant little baskets was increasing rapidly.

"Winifred, isn't this work, with your walk to the Bagley cottage, too much for you?"

"Oh, no," she replied, lightly. "An afternoon in idleness in a stifling city flat would have been more exhausting. It's growing cool now. What wretched, shiftless people those Bagleys are! But I have hopes of them. I'm glad Bobsey's having a nap."

"You shall tell me about your visit to-night. We are making good progress. Bagley is doing his best. Winnie," I called, "come here."

She brought her basket, nearly filled, and I saw that her eyes were heavy with weariness also.

"You've done well to-day, my child. Now go and look after your chickens, big and little. Then your day's work is done, and you can do what you please;" and I started for the meadow again.

By six o'clock, we had in the barn three loads of hay,

and Merton had packed four crates of berries ready for market. Bobsey was now running about, as lively as a cricket, and Winnie, with a child's elasticity, was nearly as sportive. Bagley, after making up his half-hour, came up the lane with a rake, instead of his ugly dog as on the evening before. A few moments later, he helped me lift the crates into the market wagon; and then, after a little awkward hesitation, began:

"I say, Mr. Durham, can't ye give a feller a job yerself? I declar' to you, I want to brace up; but I know how it'll be down at Rollins's. He'll be savage as a meat-axe to me, and his men will be a-gibin'. Give me a job yerself, and I'll save enough out o' my wages to pay for his chickens, or you kin keep 'nuff back to pay for 'em."

I thought a moment, and then said, promptly: "I'll agree to this if Rollins will. I'll see him to-night."

"Did yer wife go to see my wife?"

"Yes, and she says she has hopes of you all. You've earned your bread to-day as honestly as I have, and you've more than paid for what my wife gave you this morning. Here's a quarter to make the day square, and here's a couple of baskets of raspberries left over. Take them to the children."

"Well, yer bring me right to the mark," he said, emphasizing his words with a slap on his thigh. "I've got an uphill row to hoe, and it's good ter have some human critters around that'll help a feller a bit."

I laughed as I clapped him on the shoulder, and said: "You're going to win the fight, Bagley. I'll see Rollins at once, for I find I shall need another man awhile."

"Give me the job then," he said, eagerly, "and give me what you think I'm wuth;" and he jogged off home with that leaven of all good in his heart—the hope of better things.

CHAPTER XXXV

"WE SHALL ALL EARN OUR SALT"

RASPBERRIES and milk, with bread and butter and a cup of tea, made a supper that we all relished, and then Merton and I started for the boat-landing. I let the boy drive and deliver the crates to the freight agent, for I wished him to relieve me of this task occasionally. On our way to the landing I saw Rollins, who readily agreed to Bagley's wish, on condition that I guaranteed payment for the chickens. Stopping at the man's cottage further on, I told him this, and he, in his emphatic way, declared: "I vow ter you, Mr. Durham, ye shan't lose a feather's worth o' the chickens."

Returning home, poor Merton was so tired and drowsy that he nearly fell off the seat. Before long I took the reins from his hands, and he was asleep with his head on my shoulder. Winifred was dozing in her chair, but brightened up as we came in. A little judicious praise and a bowl of bread and milk strengthened the boy wonderfully. He saw the need of especial effort at this time, and also saw that he was not being driven unfeelingly.

As I sat alone with my wife, resting a few minutes before retiring, I said: "Well, Winifred, it must be plain to you by this time that the summer campaign will be a hard one. How are we going to stand it?"

"I'll tell you next fall," she replied, with a laugh. "No problems to-night, thank you."

"I'm gathering a queer lot of helpers in my effort to live in the country," I continued. "There's old Mr. Jacox,

who is too aged to hold his own in other harvest-fields. Bagley and his tribe—"

"And a city wife and a lot of city children," she added.

"And a city greenhorn of a man at the head of you all," I concluded.

"Well," she replied, rising with an odd little blending of laugh and yawn, "I'm not afraid but that we shall all earn our salt."

Thus came to an end the long, eventful day, which prepared the way for many others of similar character, and suggested many of the conditions of our problem of country living.

Bagley appeared bright and early the following morning with his two elder children, and I was now confronted with the task of managing them and making them useful. Upon one thing I was certainly resolved—there should be no quixotic sentiment in our relations, and no companionship between his children and mine.

Therefore, I took him and his girl and boy aside, and said: "I'm going to be simple and outspoken with you. Some of my neighbors think I'm a fool because I give you work when I can get others. I shall prove that I am not a fool, for the reason that I shall not permit any nonsense, and you can show that I am not a fool by doing your work well and quietly. Bagley, I want you to understand that your children do not come here to play with mine. No matter whom I employed, I should keep my children by themselves. Now, do you understand this?"

They nodded affirmatively.

"Are you all willing to take simple, straightforward directions, and do your best? I'm not asking what is unreasonable, for I shall not be more strict with you than with my own children."

"No use o' beatin' around the bush, Mr. Durham," said Bagley, good-naturedly; "we've come here to 'arn our livin', and to do as you say."

"I can get along with you, Bagley, but your children will find it hard to follow my rules, because they are children, and are not used to restraint. Yet they must do it, or there'll be trouble at once. They must work quietly and steadily while they do work, and when I am through with them, they must go straight home. They mustn't lounge about the place. If they will obey, Mrs. Durham and I will be good friends to them, and by fall we will fix them up so that they can go to school."

The little arabs looked askance at me and made me think of two wild animals that had been caught, and were intelligent enough to understand that they must be tamed. They were submissive, but made no false pretences of enjoying the prospect.

"I shall keep a gad handy," said their father, with a significant nod at them.

"Well, youngsters," I concluded, laughing, "perhaps you'll need it occasionally. I hope not, however. I shall keep no gad, but I shall have an eye on you when you least expect it; and if you go through the picking-season well, I shall have a nice present for you both. Now, you are to receive so much a basket, if the baskets are properly filled, and therefore it will depend on yourselves how much you earn. You shall be paid every day. So now for a good start toward becoming a man and a woman."

I led them to one side of the raspberry patch and put them under Merton's charge saying, "You must pick exactly as he directs."

Winnie and Bobsey were to pick in another part of the field, Mousie aiding until the sun grew too warm for the delicate child. Bagley was to divide his time between hoeing in the garden and spreading the grass after the scythe of old Mr. Jacox. From my ladder against a cherry-tree, I was able to keep a general outlook over my motley forces, and we all made good progress till dinner, which, like the help we employed, we now had at twelve o'clock. Bagley and

his children sat down to their lunch under the shade of an apple-tree at some distance, yet in plain view through our open door. Their repast must have been meagre, judging from the time in which it was despatched, and my wife said, "Can't I send them something?"

"Certainly; what have you to send?"

"Well, I've made a cherry pudding; I don't suppose there is much more than enough for us, though."

"Children," I cried, "let's take a vote. Shall we share our cherry pudding with the Bagleys?"

"Yes," came the unanimous reply, although Bobsey's voice was rather faint.

Merton carried the delicacy to the group under the tree, and it was gratefully and speedily devoured.

"That is the way to the hearts of those children," said my wife, at the same time slyly slipping her portion of the pudding upon Bobsey's plate.

I appeared very blind, but asked her to get me something from the kitchen. While she was gone, I exchanged my plate of pudding, untouched as yet, for hers, and gave the children a wink. We all had a great laugh over mamma's well-assumed surprise and perplexity. How a little fun will freshen up children, especially when, from necessity, their tasks are long and heavy!

We were startled from the table by a low mutter of thunder. Hastening out, I saw an ominous cloud in the west. My first thought was that all should go to the raspberries and pick till the rain drove us in; but Bagley now proved a useful friend, for he shambled up and said: "If I was you, I'd have those cherries picked fust. You'll find that a thunder-shower'll rot 'em in one night. The wet won't hurt the berries much."

His words reminded me of what I had seen when a boy—a tree full of split, half-decayed cherries—and I told him to go to picking at once. I also sent his eldest boy and Merton into the trees. Old Jacox was told to get the grass he had

cut into as good shape as possible before the shower. My wife and Mousie left the table standing, and, hastening to the raspberry field, helped Winnie and Bobsey and the other Bagley child to pick the ripest berries. We all worked like beavers till the vivid flashes and great drops drove us to shelter.

Fortunately, the shower came up slowly, and we nearly stripped the cherry-trees, carrying the fruit into the house, there to be arranged for market in the neat peck-baskets with coarse bagging covers which Mr. Bogart had sent me. The little baskets of raspberries almost covered the barn floor by the time the rain began, but they were safe. At first, the children were almost terrified by the vivid lightning, but this phase of the storm soon passed, and the clouds seemed to settle down for a steady rain.

"'Tisn't goin' to let up," said Bagley, after a while. "We might as well jog home now as any time."

"But you'll get wet," I objected.

"It won't be the fust time," answered Bagley. "The children don't mind it any more'n ducks."

"Well, let's settle, then," I said. "You need some money to buy food at once."

"I reckon I do," was the earnest reply.

"There's a dollar for your day's work, and here is what your children have earned. Are you satisfied?" I asked.

"I be, and I thank you, sir. I'll go down to the store this evenin'," he added.

"And buy food only," I said, with a meaning look.

"Flour and pork only, sir. I've given you my hand on't;" and away they all jogged through the thick-falling drops.

We packed our fruit for market, and looked vainly for clearing skies in the west.

"There's no help for it," I said. "The sooner I start for the landing the better, so that I can return before it becomes very dark."

My wife exclaimed against this, but I added: "Think a moment, my dear. By good management we have here, safe and in good order, thirty dollars' worth of fruit, at least. Shall I lose it because I am afraid of a summer shower? Facing the weather is a part of my business; and I'd face a storm any day in the year if I could make thirty dollars."

Merton wished to go also, but I said, "No; there must be no risks of illness that can possibly be avoided."

I did not find it a dreary expedition, after all, for I solaced myself with thoughts like these, "Thirty dollars, under my wife's good management, will go far toward providing warm winter clothing, or paying the interest, or something else."

Then the rain was just what was needed to increase and prolong the yield of the raspberry bushes, on which there were still myriads of immature berries and even blossoms. Abundant moisture would perfect these into plump fruit; and upon this crop rested our main hope.

CHAPTER XXXVI

A THUNDERBOLT

FROM the experiences just related, it can be seen how largely the stress and strain of the year centred in the month of July. Nearly all our garden crops needed attention; the grass of the meadow had to be cured into hay, the currants and cherries to be picked, and fall crops, like winter cabbages, turnips, and celery, to be put in the ground. Of the latter vegetable, I set out only a few short rows, regarding it as a delicious luxury to which not very much time could be given.

Mr. Jones and Junior, indeed all our neighbors, were working early and late, like ourselves. Barns were being filled, conical hay-stacks were rising in distant meadows, and every one was busy in gathering nature's bounty.

We were not able to make much of the Fourth of July. Bobsey and Winnie had some firecrackers, and, in the evening, Merton and Junior set off a few rockets, and we all said, "Ah!" appreciatively, as they sped their brief fiery course; but the greater part of the day had to be spent in gathering the ripening black-caps and raspberries. By some management, however, I arranged that Merton and Junior should have a fine swim in the creek, by Brittle Rock, while Mousie, Winnie, and Bobsey waded in sandy shallows, further down the stream. They all were promised holidays after the fruit season was over, and they submitted to the necessity of almost constant work with fairly good grace.

The results of our labor were cheering. Our table was supplied with delicious vegetables, which, in the main,

it was Mousie's task to gather and prepare. The children were as brown as little Indians, and we daily thanked God for health. Checks from Mr. Bogart came regularly, the fruit bringing a fair price under his good management. The outlook for the future grew brighter with the beginning of each week; for on Monday he made his returns and sent me the proceeds of the fruit shipped previously. I was able to pay all outstanding accounts for what had been bought to stock the place, and I also induced Mr. Jones to receive the interest in advance on the mortgage he held. Then we began to hoard for winter.

The Bagleys did as well as we could expect, I suppose. The children did need the "gad" occasionally and the father indulged in a few idle, surly, drinking days; but, convinced that the man was honestly trying, I found that a little tact and kindness always brought him around to renewed endeavor. To expect immediate reform and unvaried well-doing would be asking too much of such human nature as theirs.

As July drew to a close, my wife and I felt that we were succeeding better than we had had reason to expect. In the height of the season we had to employ more children in gathering the raspberries, and I saw that I could increase the yield in coming years, as I learned the secrets of cultivation. I also decided to increase the area of this fruit by a fall-planting of some varieties that ripened earlier and later, thus extending the season and giving me a chance to ship to market for weeks instead of days. My strawberry plants were sending out a fine lot of new runners, and our hopes for the future were turning largely toward the cultivation of this delicious fruit.

Old Jacox had plodded faithfully over the meadow with his scythe, and the barn was now so well filled that I felt our bay horse and brindle cow were provided for during the months when fields are bare or snowy.

Late one afternoon, he was helping me gather up almost the last load down by the creek, when the heavy roll of

thunder warned us to hasten. As we came up to the high ground near the house, we were both impressed by the ominous blackness of a cloud rising in the west. I felt that the only thing to do was to act like the captain of a vessel before a storm, and make everything "snug and tight." The load of hay was run in upon the barn floor, and the old horse led with the harness on him to the stall below. Bagley and the children, with old Jacox, were started off so as to be at home before the shower, doors and windows were fastened, and all was made as secure as possible.

Then we gathered in our sitting-room, where Mousie and my wife had prepared supper; but we all were too oppressed with awe of the coming tempest to sit down quietly, as usual. There was a death-like stillness in the sultry air, broken only at intervals by the heavy rumble of thunder. The strange, dim twilight soon passed into the murkiest gloom, and we had to light the lamp far earlier than our usual hour. I had never seen the children so affected before. Winnie and Bobsey even began to cry with fear, while Mousie was pale and trembling. Of course, we laughed at them and tried to cheer them; but even my wife was nervously apprehensive, and I admit that I felt a disquietude hard to combat.

Slowly and remorselessly the cloud approached, until it began to pass over us. The thunder and lightning were simply terrific. Supper remained untasted on the table, and I said: "Patience and courage! A few moments more and the worst will be over!"

But my words were scarcely heard, so violent was the gust that burst upon us. For a few moments it seemed as if everything would go down before it, but the old house only shook and rocked a little.

"Hurrah!" I cried. "The bulk of the gust has gone by, and now we are all right!"

At that instant a blinding gleam and an instantaneous crash left us stunned and bewildered. But as I recovered my senses, I saw flames bursting from the roof of our barn.

CHAPTER XXXVII

RALLYING FROM THE BLOW

OUR house was far enough from the barn to prevent the shock of the thunderbolt from disabling us beyond a moment or two. Merton had fallen off his chair, but was on his feet almost instantly; the other children were soon sobbing and clinging to my wife and myself.

In tones that I sought to render firm and quiet, I said: "No more of this foolish fear. We are in God's hands, and He will take care of us. Winifred, you must rally and soothe the children, while Merton and I go out and save what we can. All danger to the house is now over, for the worst of the storm has passed."

In a moment my wife, although very pale, was reassuring the younger children, and Merton and I rushed forth.

"Lead the horse out of the barn basement, Merton," I cried, "and tie him securely behind the house. If he won't go readily, throw a blanket over his eyes."

I spoke these words as we ran through the torrents of rain precipitated by the tremendous concussion which the lightning had produced.

I opened the barn doors and saw that the hay was on fire. There was not a second to lose, and excitement doubled my strength. The load of hay on the wagon had not yet caught. Although nearly stifled with sulphurous smoke, I seized the shafts and backed the wagon with its burden out into the rain. Then, seizing a fork, I pushed and tossed off the load so that I could draw our useful market vehicle to a safe

distance. There were a number of crates and baskets in the barn, also some tools, etc. These I had to let go. Hastening to the basement, I found that Merton had succeeded in getting the horse away. There was still time to smash the window of the poultry-room and toss the chickens out of doors. Our cow, fortunately, was in the meadow.

By this time Mr. Jones and Junior were on the ground, and they were soon followed by Rollins, Bagley, and others. There was nothing to do now, however, but to stand aloof and witness the swift destruction. After the first great gust had passed, there was fortunately but little wind, and the heavy downpour prevented the flames from spreading. In this we stood, scarcely heeding it in the excitement of the hour. After a few moments I hastened to assure my trembling wife and crying children that the rain made the house perfectly safe, and that they were in no danger at all. Then I called to the neighbors to come and stand under the porch-roof.

From this point we could see the great pyramid of fire and smoke ascending into the black sky. The rain-drops glittered like fiery hail in the intense light and the still vivid flashes from the clouds.

"This is hard luck, neighbor Durham," said Mr. Jones, with a long breath.

"My wife and children are safe," I replied, quietly.

Then we heard the horse neighing and tugging at his halter. Bagley had the good sense and will to jerk off his coat, tie it around the animal's eyes, and lead him to a distance from the fatal fascination of the flames.

In a very brief space of time the whole structure, with my summer crop of hay, gathered with so much labor, sunk down into glowing, hissing embers. I was glad to have the ordeal over, and to be relieved from fear that the wind would rise again. Now I was assured of the extent of our loss, as well as of its certainty.

"Well, well," said the warm-hearted and impulsive Rollins, "when you are ready to build again, your neighbors will

give you a lift. By converting Bagley into a decent fellow, you've made all our barns safer, and we owe you a good turn. He was worse than lightning."

I expressed my thanks, adding, "This isn't as bad as you think; I'm insured."

"Well, now, that's sensible," said Mr. Jones. "I'll sleep better for that fact, and so will you, Robert Durham. You'll make a go of it here yet."

"I'm not in the least discouraged," I answered; "far worse things might have happened. I've noticed in my paper that a good many barns have been struck this summer, so my experience is not unusual. The only thing to do is to meet such things patiently and make the best of them. As long as the family is safe and well, outside matters can be remedied. Thank you, Bagley," I continued, addressing him, as he now led forward the horse. "You had your wits about you. Old Bay will have to stand under the shed to-night."

"Well, Mr. Durham, the harness is still on him, all 'cept the head-stall; and he's quiet now."

"Yes," I replied, "in our haste we didn't throw off the harness before the shower, and it has turned out very well."

"Tell ye what it is, neighbors," said practical Mr. Jones; "'tisn't too late for Mr. Durham to sow a big lot of fodder corn, and that's about as good as hay. We'll turn to and help him get some in."

This was agreed to heartily, and one after another they wrung my hand and departed, Bagley jogging in a companionable way down the road with Rollins, whose chickens he had stolen, but had already paid for.

I looked after them and thought: "Thank Heaven I have not lost my barn as some thought I might at one time! As Rollins suggested, I'd rather take my chances with the lightning than with a vicious neighbor. Bagley acted the part of a good friend to-night."

Then, seeing that we could do nothing more, Merton and I entered the house.

I clapped the boy on the shoulder as I said: "You acted like a man in the emergency, and I'm proud of you. The bringing out a young fellow strong is almost worth the cost of a barn."

My wife came and put her arm around my neck and said: "You bear up bravely, Robert, but I fear you are discouraged at heart. To think of such a loss, just as we were getting started!" and there were tears in her eyes.

"Yes," I replied, "it will be a heavy loss for us, and a great inconvenience, but it might have been so much worse! All sit down and I'll tell you something. You see my training in business led me to think of the importance of insurance, and to know the best companies. As soon as the property became yours, Winifred, I insured the buildings for nearly all they were worth. The hay and the things in the barn at the time will prove a total loss; but it is a loss that we can stand and make good largely before winter. I tell you honestly that we have no reason to be discouraged. We shall soon have a better barn than the one lost; for, by good planning, a better one can be built for the money that I shall receive. So we will thank God that we are all safe ourselves, and go quietly to sleep."

With the passing of the storm, the children had become quiet, and soon we lost in slumber all thought of danger and loss.

In the morning the absence of the barn made a great gap in our familiar outlook, and brought many and serious thoughts; but with the light came renewed hopefulness. All the scene was flooded with glorious sunlight, and only the blackened ruins made the frightful storm of the previous evening seem possible. Nearly all the chickens came at Winnie's call, looking draggled and forlorn indeed, but practically unharmed, and ready to resume their wonted cheerfulness after an hour in the sunshine. We fitted up for them the old coop in the orchard, and a part of the ancient and dilapidated barn which was to have been used for corn-stalks only. The drenching rain had saved this and the adjoining shed

from destruction, and now in our great emergency they proved useful indeed.

The trees around the site of the barn were blackened, and their foliage was burned to a crisp. Within the stone foundations the smoke from the still smouldering debris rose sluggishly.

I turned away from it all, saying: "Let us worry no more over that spilled milk. Fortunately the greater part of our crates and baskets were under the shed. Take the children, Merton, and pick over the raspberry patches carefully once more, while I go to work in the garden. That has been helped rather than injured by the storm, and, if we will take care of it, will give us plenty of food for winter. Work there will revive my spirits."

The ground was too wet for the use of the hoe, but there was plenty of weeding to be done, while I answered the questions of neighbors who came to offer their sympathy. I also looked around to see what could be sold, feeling the need of securing every dollar possible. I found much that was hopeful and promising. The Lima-bean vines had covered the poles, and toward their base the pods were filling out. The ears on our early corn were fit to pull; the beets and onions had attained a good size; the early peas had given place to turnips, winter cabbages, and celery; there were plenty of green melons on the vines, and more cucumbers than we could use. The remaining pods on the first planting of bush-beans were too mature for use, and I resolved to let them stand till sufficiently dry to be gathered and spread in the attic. All that we had planted had done, or was doing, fairly well, for the season had been moist enough to ensure a good growth. We had been using new potatoes since the first of the month, and now the vines were so yellow that all in the garden could be dug at once and sold. They would bring in some ready money, and I learned from my garden book that strap-leaved turnips, sown on the cleared spaces, would have time to mature.

After all, my strawberry beds gave me the most hope.

There were hundreds of young plants already rooted, and still more lying loosely on the ground; so I spent the greater part of the morning in weeding these out and pressing the young plants on the ends of the runners into the moist soil, having learned that with such treatment they form roots and become established in a very few days.

After dinner Mr. Jones appeared with his team and heavy plow, and we selected an acre of upland meadow where the sod was light and thin.

"This will give a fair growth of young corn-leaves," he said, "by the middle of September. By that time you'll have a new barn up, I s'pose; and after you have cut and dried the corn, you can put a little of it into the mows in place of the hay. The greater part will keep better if stacked out-doors. A horse will thrive on such fodder almost as well as a cow, 'specially if ye cut it up and mix a little bran-meal with it. We'll sow the corn in drills a foot apart, and you can spread a little manure over the top of the ground after the seed is in. This ground is a trifle thin; a top-dressin' will help it 'mazin'ly."

Merton succeeded in getting several crates of raspberries, but said that two or three more pickings would finish them. Since the time we had begun to go daily to the landing, we had sent the surplus of our vegetables to a village store, with the understanding that we would trade out the proceeds. We thus had accumulated a little balance in our favor, which we could draw against in groceries, etc.

On the evening of this day I took the crates to the landing, and found a purchaser for my garden potatoes, at a dollar a bushel. I also made arrangements at a summer boarding-house, whose proprietor agreed to take the largest of our spring chickens, our sweet corn, tomatoes, and some other vegetables, as we had them to spare. Now that our income from raspberries was about to cease, it was essential to make the most of everything else on the place that would bring money, even if we had to deny ourselves. It would not do for us to say, "We can use this or that ourselves."

The question to be decided was, whether, if such a thing were sold, the proceeds would not go further toward our support than the things themselves. If this should be true of sweet corn, Lima-beans, and even the melons on which the children had set their hearts, we must be chary of consuming them ourselves. This I explained in such a way that all except Bobsey saw the wisdom of it, or, rather, the necessity. As yet, Bobsey's tendencies were those of a consumer, and not of a producer or saver.

Rollins and one or two others came the next day, and with Bagley's help the corn was soon in the ground.

Then I set Bagley to work with the cart spreading upon the soil the barn-yard compost that had accumulated since spring. There was not enough to cover all the ground, but that I could not help. The large pile of compost that I had made near the poultry-house door could not be spared for this purpose, since it was destined for my August planting of strawberries.

Perhaps I may as well explain about these compost heaps now as at any other time. I had watched their rapid growth with great satisfaction. Some may dislike such homely details, but since the success of the farm and garden depend on them I shall not pass them over, leaving the fastidious reader to do this for himself.

It will be remembered that I had sought to prepare myself for country life by much reading and study during the previous winter. I had early been impressed with the importance of obtaining and saving everything that would enrich the soil, and had been shown that increasing the manure-pile was the surest way to add to one's bank account. Therefore all rakings of leaves had been saved. At odd times Merton and I had gone down to the creek with the cart and dug a quantity of rich black earth from near its bank. One pile of this material had been placed near the stable door, and another at the entrance to the poultry-room in the basement of our vanished barn. The cleanings of the horse-stable had been spread over a layer of this black soil. When the layer

of such cleanings was about a foot thick, spread evenly, another layer of earth covered all from sun and rain. Thus I had secured a pile of compost which nearly top-dressed an acre for fodder corn.

In the poultry-room we managed in this fashion. A foot of raked-up leaves and rich earth was placed under the perches of the fowls. Every two or three weeks this layer was shovelled out and mixed thoroughly, and was replaced by a new layer. As a result I had, by the 1st of August, a large heap of fertilizer almost as good as guano, and much safer to use, for I had read that unless the latter was carefully managed it would burn vegetation like fire. I believe that this compost-heap by the poultry-room window would give my young strawberry plantation a fine start, and, as has been shown, we were making great calculations on the future fruit.

I also resolved that the burning of the barn should add to our success in this direction. All the books said that there was nothing better for strawberries than wood ashes, and of these there was a great heap within the foundations of the destroyed building. At one time I proposed to shovel out these ashes and mix them with the compost, but fortunately I first consulted my book on fertilizers, and read there that this would not do at all—that they should be used separately.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

AUGUST WORK AND PLAY

I WAS now eager to begin the setting of the strawberry plants in the field where we had put potatoes, but the recent heavy shower had kept the latter still green and growing. During the first week in August, however, I found that the tubers had attained a good size, and I began to dig long rows on the upper side of the patch, selling in the village three or four barrels of potatoes a week for immediate use.

By this course I soon had space enough cleared for ten rows of strawberries; and on the 6th of August Mr. Jones came and plowed the land deeply, going twice in a furrow. Then I harrowed the ground, and, with a corn-plow, marked out the space with shallow furrows three feet apart. Through five of these furrows Merton sprinkled a good dressing of the poultry compost, and in the remaining five drills we scattered wood ashes. Thus we should learn the comparative value of these fertilizers. Then I made a rude tray with two handles, so that it could be carried between Merton and myself. When the sun declined, we went to the strawberry bed, and having selected the Duchess variety to set out first, soaked with water a certain portion of the ground that was thick with plants. Half an hour later, we could dig up these plants with a ball of earth attached to their roots. These were carried carefully on the tray to the field, and set out in the furrows. We levelled the ground first, so that the crown of the plant should be even with the surrounding surface. We set the plants a foot apart in the rows, and by dusk had three rows out. Early the next morning we gave these

plants a good soaking in their new starting place, and, although the weather was now dry and warm, not a leaf withered, and all began to grow as if they had not been moved. It seemed slow work, but I believed it would pay in the end, especially as Merton, Winnie, and I performed nearly all the labor.

We had now dispensed with Bagley's services, a good word from me having secured him work elsewhere. I found that I could not make arrangements for rebuilding the barn before the last of August, and we now began to take a little much-needed rest. Our noonings were two or three hours long. Merton and Junior had time for a good swim every day, while the younger children were never weary of wading in the shallows. I insisted, however, that they should not remain long in the water on any one occasion, and now and then we each took a grain or two of quinine to fortify our systems against any malarial influences that might be lurking around at this season.

The children were also permitted to make expeditions to mountain-sides for huckleberries and blackberries. As a result, we often had these wholesome fruits on the table, while my wife canned the surplus for winter use. A harvest apple tree also began to be one of the most popular resorts, and delicious pies made the dinner-hour more welcome than ever. The greater part of the apples were sold, however, and this was true also of the Lima-beans, sweet corn, and melons. We all voted that the smaller ears and melons tasted just as good as if we had picked out the best of everything, and my account-book showed that our income was still running well ahead of our expenses.

Bobsey and Winnie had to receive another touch of discipline and learn another lesson from experience. I had marked with my eye a very large, perfect musk-melon, and had decided that it should be kept for seed. They, too, had marked it; and one morning, when they thought themselves unobserved, they carried it off to the seclusion of the raspberry bushes, proposing a selfish feast by themselves.

Merton caught a glimpse of the little marauders, and followed them. They cut the melon in two, and found it green and tasteless as a pumpkin. He made me laugh as he described their dismay and disgust, then their fears and forebodings. The latter were soon realized; for seeing me in the distance, he beckoned. As I approached, the children stole out of the bushes, looking very guilty.

Merton explained, and I said: "Very well, you shall have your melon for dinner, and little else. I intend you shall enjoy this melon fully. So sit down under that tree and each of you hold half the melon till I release you. You have already learned that you can feast your eyes only."

There they were kept, hour after hour, each holding half of the green melon. The dinner-bell rang, and they knew that we had ripe melons and green corn; while nothing was given them but bread and water. Bobsey howled, and Winnie sobbed, but my wife and I agreed that such tendencies toward dishonesty and selfishness merited a lasting lesson. At supper the two culprits were as hungry as little wolves; and when I explained that the big melon had been kept for seed, and that if it had been left to ripen they should have had their share, they felt that they had cheated themselves completely.

"Don't you see, children," I concluded, "that acting on the square is not only right, but that it is always best for us in the end?"

Then I asked, "Merton, what have the Bagley children been doing since they stopped picking raspberries for us?"

"I'm told they've been gathering blackberries and huckleberries in the mountains, and selling them."

"That's promising. Now I want you to pick out a good-sized water-melon and half a dozen musk-melons, and I'll leave them at Bagley's cottage to-morrow night as I go down to the village. In old times they would have stolen our crop; now they shall share in it."

When I carried the present on the following evening,

the children indulged in uncouth cries and gambols over the gift, and Bagley himself was touched.

"I'll own up ter yer," he said, "that yer melon patch was sore temptin' to the young uns, but I tole 'em that I'd thrash 'em if they teched one. Now yer see, youngsters, ye've got a man of feelin' ter deal with, and yer've got some melons arter all, and got 'em squar', too."

"I hear good accounts of you and your children," I said, "and I'm glad of it. Save the seeds of these melons and plant a lot for yourself. See here, Bagley, we'll plow your garden for you this fall, and you can put a better fence around it. If you'll do this, I'll share my garden seeds with you next spring, and you can raise enough on that patch of ground to half feed your family."

"I'll take yer up," cried the man, "and there's my hand on it ag'in."

"God bless you and Mrs. Durham!" added his wife. "We're now beginning to live like human critters."

I resumed my journey to the village, feeling that never before had melons been better invested.

The Moodna Creek had now become very low, and not more than half its stony bed was covered with water. At many points, light, active feet could find their way across and not be wet. Junior now had a project on hand, of which he and Merton had often spoken lately. A holiday was given to the boys and they went to work to construct an eel weir and trap. With trousers well rolled up, they selected a point on one side of the creek where the water was deepest, and here they left an open passage-way for the current. On each side of this they began to roll large stones, and on these placed smaller ones, raising two long obstructions to the natural flow. These continuous obstructions ran obliquely up-stream, directing the main current to the open passage, which was only about two feet wide, with a post on either side, narrowing it still more, In this they placed the trap, a long box made of lath, sufficiently open to let the water run through it, and having a peculiar opening at the upper end where the

current began to rush down the narrow passage-way. The box rested closely on the gravelly bottom, and was fastened to the posts. Short, close-fitting slats from the bottom and top of the box, at its upper end, sloped inward, till they made a narrow opening. All its other parts were eel-tight. The eels coming down with the current which had been directed toward the entrance of the box, as has been explained, passed into it, and there they would remain. They never had the wit to find the narrow aperture by which they had entered. This turned out to be useful sport, for every morning the boys lifted their trap and took out a goodly number of eels; and when the squirmers were nicely dressed and browned, they proved delicious morsels.

CHAPTER XXXIX

A TRIP TO THE SEASHORE

IN the comparative leisure which the children enjoyed during August, they felt amply repaid for the toil of the previous months. We also managed to secure two great gala-days. The first was spent in a trip to the seashore; and this was a momentous event, marred by only one slight drawback. The "Mary Powell," a swift steamer, touched every morning at the Maizeville Landing. I learned that, from its wharf, in New York, another steamer started for Coney Island, and came back in time for us to return on the "Powell" at 3.30 P.M. Thus we could secure a delightful sail down the river and bay, and also have several hours on the beach. My wife and I talked over this little outing, and found that if we took our lunch with us, it would be inexpensive. I saw Mr. Jones, and induced him and his wife, with Junior, to join us. Then the children were told of our plan, and their hurrahs made the old house ring. Now that we were in for it, we proposed no half-way measures. Four plump spring chickens were killed and roasted, and to these were added so many ham sandwiches and hard-boiled eggs, that I declared that we were provisioned for a week. My wife nodded at Bobsey, and said, "Wait and see!"

Whom do you think we employed to mount guard during our absence? No other than Bagley. Mr. Jones said that it was like asking a wolf to guard the flock, for his prejudices yielded slowly; but I felt sure that this proof of trust would do the man more good than a dozen sermons.

Indeed, he did seem wonderfully pleased with his task,

and said, "Ye'll find I've 'arned my dollar when ye git back."

The children scarcely slept in their glad anticipation, and were up with the sun. Mr. and Mrs. Jones drove down in their light wagon, while Junior joined our children in another straw-ride, packed in between the lunch-baskets. We had ample time after reaching the landing to put our horses and vehicles in a safe place, and then we watched for the "Powell." Soon we saw her approaching Newtown, four miles above, then speeding toward the wharf, and rounding into it, with the ease and grace of a swan. We scrambled aboard, smiled at by all. I suppose we did not form, with our lunch-baskets, a very stylish group, but that was the least of our troubles. I am satisfied that none of the elegant people we brushed against were half so happy as we were.

We stowed away our baskets and then gave ourselves up to the enjoyment of the lovely Highland scenery, and to watching the various kinds of craft that we were constantly passing. Winnie and Bobsey had been placed under bonds for good behavior, and were given to understand that they must exercise the grace of keeping moderately still. The sail down the river and bay was a long, grateful rest to us older people, and I saw with pleasure that my wife was enjoying every moment, and that the fresh salt breeze was fanning color into her cheeks. Plump Mrs. Jones dozed and smiled, and wondered at the objects we passed, for she had never been much of a traveller; while her husband's shrewd eyes took in everything, and he often made us laugh by his quaint remarks. Junior and Merton were as alert as hawks. They early made the acquaintance of deck-hands who good-naturedly answered their numerous questions. I took the younger children on occasional exploring expeditions, but never allowed them to go beyond my reach, for I soon learned that Bobsey's promises sat lightly on his conscience.

At last we reached the great Iron Pier at Coney Island, which we all traversed with wondering eyes.

We established ourselves in a large pavilion, fitted up

for just such picnic parties as ours. Beneath us stretched the sandy beach. We elderly people were glad enough to sit down and rest, but the children forgot even the lunch-baskets, so eager were they to run upon the sand in search of shells.

All went well until an unusually high wave came rolling in. The children scrambled out of its way, with the exception of Bobsey, who was caught and tumbled over, and lay kicking in the white foam. In a moment I sprang down the steps, picked him up, and bore him to his mother.

He was wet through; and now what was to be done? After inquiry and consultation, I found that I could procure for him a little bathing-dress which would answer during the heat of the day, and an old colored woman promised to have his clothing dry in an hour. So the one cloud on our pleasure proved to have a very bright lining, for Bobsey, since he was no longer afraid of the water, could roll in the sand and the gentle surf to his heart's content.

Having devoured a few sandwiches to keep up our courage, we all procured bathing-dresses, even Mrs. Jones having been laughingly compelled by her husband to follow the general example. When we all gathered in the passage-way leading to the water, we were convulsed with laughter at our ridiculous appearance; but there were so many others in like plight that we were scarcely noticed. Mrs. Jones's dress was a trifle small, and her husband's immensely large. He remarked that if we could now take a stroll through Maizeville, there wouldn't be a crow left in town.

Mrs. Jones could not be induced to go beyond a point where the water was a foot or two deep, and the waves rolled her around like an amiable porpoise. Merton and Junior were soon swimming fearlessly, the latter wondering, meanwhile, at the buoyant quality of the salt water. My wife, Mousie, and Winnie allowed me to take them beyond the breakers, and soon grew confident. In fifteen minutes I sounded recall, and we all emerged, lank Mr. Jones now making, in very truth, an ideal scarecrow. Bobsey's dry gar-

ments were brought, and half an hour later we were all clothed, and, as Mr. Jones remarked, "For a wonder, in our right minds."

The onslaught then made on the lunch-baskets was never surpassed, even at that place of hungry excursionists. In due time we reached home, tired, sleepy, yet content with the fact that we had filled one day with enjoyment and added to our stock of health.

The next morning proved that Bagley had kept his word. Everything was in order, and the amount of work accomplished in the garden showed that he had been on his mettle. Hungry as we had been, we had not emptied our lunch-baskets, and my wife made up a nice little present from what remained, to which was added a package of candy, and all was carried to the Bagley cottage.

Juvenile experiences had not exactly taught the Bagley children that "the way of the transgressor is hard,"—they had not gone far enough for that,—and it certainly was our duty to add such flowers as we could to the paths of virtue.

The month of August was now well advanced. We had been steadily digging the potatoes in the field and selling them in their unripened condition, until half the acre had been cleared. The vines in the lower half of the patch were now growing very yellow, and I decided to leave them, until the tubers should thoroughly ripen, for winter use. By the 20th of the month we had all the space that had been cleared, that is, half an acre, filled with Duchess and Wilson strawberries; and the plants first set were green and vigorous, with renewed running tendencies. But the runners were promptly cut off, so that the plants might grow strong enough to give a good crop of fruit in the following June.

I now began to tighten the reins on the children, and we all devoted more hours to work.

During the month we gathered a few bushels of plums on the place. My wife preserved some, and the rest were sold at the boarding-houses and village stores, for Mr. Bogart had written that when I could find a home market for small

quantities of produce, it would pay me better than to send them to the city. I kept myself informed as to city prices, and found that he had given me good and disinterested advice. Therefore, we managed to dispose of our small crop of early pears and peaches as we had done with the plums. Every day convinced me of the wisdom of buying a place already stocked with fruit; for, although the first cost was greater, we had immediately secured an income which promised to leave a margin of profit after meeting all expenses.

During the last week of August the potatoes were fully ripe, and Merton, Winnie, Bobsey, and I worked manfully, sorting the large from the small, as they were gathered. The crop turned out very well, especially on the lower side of the field, where the ground had been rather richer and moister than in the upper portion.

I did not permit Merton to dig continuously, as it was hard work for him; but he seemed to enjoy throwing out the great, smooth, white-coated fellows, and they made a pretty sight as they lay in thick rows behind us, drying, for a brief time, in the sun. They were picked up, put into barrels, drawn to the dry, cool shed, and well covered from the light. Mr. Jones had told me that as soon as potatoes had dried off after digging, they ought to be kept in the dark, since too much light makes them tough and bitter. Now that they were ripe, it was important that they should be dug promptly, for I had read that a warm rain is apt to start the new potatoes to growing, and this spoils them for table use.

So I said: "We will stick to this task until it is finished, and then we shall have another outing. I am almost ready to begin rebuilding the barn; but before I do so, I wish to visit Houghton Farm, and shall take you all with me. I may obtain some ideas which will be useful, even in my small outlay of money."

CHAPTER XL

A VISIT TO HOUGHTON FARM

HOUGHTON FARM, distant a few miles, is a magnificent estate of about one thousand acres, and the outbuildings upon it are princely in comparison with anything I could erect. They had been constructed, however, on practical and scientific principles, and I hoped that a visit might suggest to me some useful points. Sound principles might be applied, in a modest way, to even such a structure as would come within my means. At any rate, a visit to such a farm would be full of interest and pleasure. So we dug away at the potatoes, and worked like ants in gathering them, until we had nearly a hundred bushels stored. As they were only fifty cents a bushel, I resolved to keep them until the following winter and spring, when I might need money more than at present, and also get better prices.

Then, one bright day toward the end of August, we all started, after an early dinner, for the farm, Junior going with us as usual. We had been told that the large-minded and liberal owner of this model farm welcomed visitors, and so we had no doubts as to our reception. Nor were we disappointed when, having skirted broad, rich fields for some distance, we turned to the right down a long, wide lane, bordered by beautiful shrubbery, and leading to the great buildings, which were numbered conspicuously. We were courteously met by Major Alvord, the agent in charge of the entire estate. I explained the object of my visit, and he kindly gave us a few moments, showing us through the different barns and stables. Our eyes grew large with won-

der as we saw the complete appliances for carrying on an immense stock-farm. The summer crops had been gathered, and we exclaimed at the hundreds of tons of hay, fodder, and straw stored in the mows.

"We use a ton of hay daily, after the pasture season is over," remarked our guide.

When we came to look at the sleek Jersey cows and calves, with their fawn-like faces, our admiration knew no bounds. We examined the stalls in which could stand thirty-four cows. Over each was the name of the occupant, all blood animals of the purest breed, with a pedigree which might put to shame many newly rich people displaying coats-of-arms. The children went into ecstasies over the pretty, innocent faces of the Jersey calves, and Mousie said they were "nice enough to kiss." Then we were shown the great, thick-necked, black-headed Jersey bull, and could scarcely believe our ears when told that he, his mother, and six brothers represented values amounting to about a hundred thousand dollars.

We next visited a great Norman mare, as big as two ordinary horses, and the large, clumsy colt at her side; then admired beautiful stallions with fiery eyes and arching necks; also the superb carriage-horses, and the sleek, strong work animals. Their stalls were finely finished in Georgia pine. Soon afterward, Bobsey went wild over the fat little Essex pigs, black as coals, but making the whitest and sweetest of pork.

"Possess your soul in patience, Bobsey," I said. "With our barn, I am going to make a sty, and then we will have some pigs."

I had had no good place for them thus far, and felt that we had attempted enough for beginners. Moreover, I could not endure to keep pigs in the muddy pens in ordinary use, feeling that we could never eat the pork produced under such conditions.

The milk-house and dairy were examined, and we thought of the oceans of milk that had passed through them.

A visit to "Crusoe Island" entertained the children more than anything else. A mountain stream had been dammed so as to make an island. On the surrounding waters were fleets of water-fowl, ducks and geese of various breeds, and, chief in interest, a flock of Canada wild-geese, domesticated. Here we could look closely at these great wild migrants that, spring and fall, pass and repass high up in the sky, in flocks, flying in the form of a harrow or the two sides of a triangle, meanwhile sending out cries that, in the distance, sound strange and weird.

Leaving my wife and children admiring these birds and their rustic houses on the island, I went with Major Alvord to his offices, and saw the fine scientific appliances for carrying on agricultural experiments designed to extend the range of accurate and practical knowledge. Not only was the great farm planted and reaped, blood stock grown and improved by careful breeding, but, accompanying all this labor, was maintained a careful system of experiments tending to develop and establish that supreme science—the successful culture of the soil. Major Alvord evidently deserved his reputation for doing the work thoroughly and intelligently, and I was glad to think that there were men in the land, like the proprietor of Houghton Farm, who are willing to spend thousands annually in enriching the rural classes by bringing within their reach the knowledge that is power.

After a visit to the sheep and poultry departments, each occupying a large farm by itself, we felt that we had seen much to think and talk over.

It was hard to get Winnie away from the poultry-houses and yards, where each celebrated breed was kept scrupulously by itself. There were a thousand hens, besides innumerable young chickens. We were also shown incubators, which, in spring, hatch little chickens by hundreds.

"Think of fifteen hundred eggs at a sitting, Winnie!" I cried; "that's quite a contrast to the number that you put under one of your biddies at home."

"I don't care," replied the child; "we've raised over a hundred chickens since we began."

"Yes, indeed," I said. "That for you—for you have seen to it all chiefly—is a greater success than anything here."

I was thoughtful as we drove home, and at last my wife held out a penny.

"No," I said, laughing; "my thoughts shall not cost you even that. What I have seen to-day has made clearer what I have believed before. There are two distinct ways of securing success in outdoor work. One is ours, and the other is after the plan of Houghton Farm. Ours is the only one possible for us—that of working a small place and performing the labor, as far as possible, ourselves. If I had played 'boss,' as Bagley sometimes calls me, and hired the labor which we have done ourselves, the children meanwhile idle, we should soon come to a disastrous end in our country experiment. The fact that we have all worked hard, and wisely, too, in the main, and have employed extra help only when there was more than we could do, will explain our account-book; that is, the balance in our favor. I believe that one of the chief causes of failure on the part of people in our circumstances is, that they employ help to do what they should have done themselves, and that it doesn't and can't pay small farmers and fruit-growers to attempt much beyond what they can take care of, most of the year, with their own hands. Then there's the other method—that of large capital carrying things on as we have seen to-day. The farm then becomes like a great factory or mercantile house. There must be at the head of everything a large organizing brain capable of introducing and enforcing thorough system, and of skilfully directing labor and investment, so as to secure the most from the least outlay. A farm such as we have just seen would be like a bottomless pit for money in bungling, careless hands."

"I'm content with our own little place and modest

ways," said my wife. "I never wish our affairs to grow so large that we can't talk them over every night, if so inclined."

"Well," I replied, "I feel as you do. I never should have made a great merchant in town, and I am content to be a small farmer in the country, sailing close to shore in snug canvas, with no danger of sudden wreck keeping me awake nights. The insurance money will be available in a few days, and we shall begin building at once."

The next day Merton and I cleared away the rest of the débris in and around the foundations of the barn, and before night the first load of lumber arrived from the carpenter who had taken the contract.

This forerunner of bustling workmen, and all the mystery of fashioning crude material into something looking like the plan over which we had all pored so often, was more interesting to the children than the construction of Solomon's temple.

"To-morrow the stone-masons come," I said at supper, "and by October we are promised a new barn."

CHAPTER XLI

HOARDING FOR WINTER

AS was stated early in this simple history the original barn was built on a hillside, the rear facing the southeast; and since the foundations were still in a fair condition, and the site was convenient, I determined to build on the same spot, somewhat modifying the old plan. I had read of the importance of keeping manure under cover, and now arranged that by a trap door the cleanings of the horse and cow stable should be thrown into the basement, which, by a solid brick partition, should be so divided as to leave ample room for a dark cellar in which to store roots and apples. Through this trap door in the stable rich earth and muck from the banks of the creek could be thrown down also, covering the manure, and all could be worked over and mixed on rainy days. By this method I could make the most of my fertilizers, which may be regarded as the driving-wheel of the farm.

I had decided that the poultry-house and pigsty should form an extension to the barn, and that both should be built in the side of the bank also. They would thus have an exposure to the south, and at the same time, being formed in part by an excavation, would be cool in summer. The floor of the sty should have a slight downward slope, and be cemented. Therefore it could be kept perfectly clean. This residence of Bobsey's future pets should be at the extreme end of the extension, and above it should be a room in which I could store picked-up apples, corn, and other food adapted to their needs, also a conduit by which swill could be poured into the trough below without

the necessity of entering the pen. I proposed to keep only two or three pigs at a time, buying them when young from neighboring farmers, and fattening them for our own use according to my own ideas.

The poultry-house, between the barn and sty, was to be built so that its side, facing the south, should be chiefly of glass. It was so constructed as to secure the greatest amount of light and warmth. Eggs in winter form the most profitable item in poultry keeping, and these depend on warmth, food, shelter, and cleanliness, with the essential condition that the hens are young. All the pullets of Winnie's early broods therefore had been kept, and only the young cockerels eaten or sold. We had the prospect of wintering about fifty laying hens; and the small potatoes we had saved would form a large portion of their food. Indeed, for some weeks back, such small tubers, boiled and mashed with meal, had formed the main feed of our growing chickens.

I learned that Bagley was out of work, and employed him to excavate the bank for these new buildings. We saved the surface earth carefully for compost purposes, and then struck some clean, nice gravel, which was carted away to a convenient place for our roads and walks. On a hillside near the creek were large stones and rocks in great quantity, and some of these were broken up for the foundations. Along the edge of the creek we also found some excellent sand, and therefore were saved not a little expense in starting our improvements.

It did not take the masons long to point up and strengthen the old foundations, and early in September everything was under full headway, the sound of hammer, saw, and plane resounding all day long. It was Winnie's and Bobsey's task to gather up the shavings and refuse bits of lumber, and carry them to the woodhouse.

"The ease and quickness with which we can build fires next winter," I said, "is a pleasant thing to think of."

Meanwhile the garden was not neglected. The early

flight of summer-boarders had greatly reduced the demand for vegetables, and now we began to hoard them for our own use. The Lima-beans were allowed to dry on the vines; the matured pods of the bush-beans were spread in the attic; thither also the ripened onions were brought and placed in shallow boxes. As far as possible we had saved our own seed, and I had had a box made and covered with tin, so as to be mouse-proof, and in this we placed the different varieties, carefully labelled. Although it was not "apple year," a number of our trees were in bearing. The best of the windfalls were picked up, and, with the tomatoes and such other vegetables as were in demand, sent to the village twice a week. As fast as crops matured, the ground was cleared, and the refuse, such as contained no injurious seeds, was saved as a winter covering for the strawberry plants.

Our main labor, however, after digging the rest of the potatoes, was the setting of the remaining half-acre in the later varieties of the strawberry. Although the early part of September was very dry and warm, we managed to set out, in the manner I have described, two or three rows nearly every afternoon. The nights had now grown so long and cool that one thorough watering seemed to establish the plants. This was due chiefly to the fact that nearly every plant had a ball of earth attached to the roots, and had never been allowed to wilt at all in the transition. About the middle of the month there came a fine rain, and we filled the remainder of the ground in one day, all the children aiding me in the task. The plants first set out were now strong and flourishing. Each had a bunch of foliage six inches in diameter.

Thus, with helping on the new barn and other work, September saw a renewal of our early-summer activity.

"The winds in the trees are whispering of winter," I said to the children, "and all thrifty creatures—ants, bees, and squirrels—are laying up their stores. So must we."

I had watched our maturing corn with great satisfaction.

For a long time Merton had been able to walk through it without his straw hat being seen above the nodding tassels. One day, about the 20th of the month, Mr. Jones came over with some bundles of long rye straw in his wagon, and said, "Yer can't guess what these are fer."

"Some useful purpose, or you wouldn't have brought them," I replied.

"We'll see. Come with me to the corn patch."

As we started he took a bundle under his arm, and I saw that he had in his hand a tool called a corn-knife. Going through the rows he occasionally stripped down the husks from an ear.

Finally he said: "Yes, it's ready. Don't yer see that the kernels are plump and glazed? Junior and I are going to tackle our corn ter-morrow, and says I to myself, 'If ourn is ready to cut, so is neighbor Durham's.' The sooner it's cut after it's ready, the better. The stalks are worth more for fodder, and you run no risk from an early frost, which would spile it all. You and Merton pitch in as yer allers do, and this is the way ter do it."

With his left hand gathering the stalks of a hill together above the ears, he cut them all off with one blow of the corn-knife within six inches of the ground, and then leaned them against the stalks of an uncut hill. This he continued to do until he had made what he called a "stout," or a bunch of stalks as large as he could conveniently reach around, the uncut hill of stalks forming a support in the centre. Then he took a wisp of the rye-straw, divided it evenly, and putting the ends together, twisted it speedily into a sort of rope. With this he bound the stout tightly above the ears by a simple method which one showing made plain to me.

"Well, you are a good neighbor!" I exclaimed.

"Pshaw! What does this amount to? If a man can't do a good turn when it costs as little as this, he's a mighty mean feller. You forget that I've sold you a lot of rye-straw, and so have the best of yer after all."

"I don't forget anything, Mr. Jones. As you say, I believe we shall 'make a go' of it here, but we always remember how much we owe to you and Junior. You've taken my money in a way that saved my self-respect, and made me feel that I could go to you as often as I wished; but you have never taken advantage of me, and you have kept smart people from doing it. Do you know, Mr. Jones, that in every country village there are keen, weasel-like people who encourage new-comers by bleeding their pocket-books at every chance? In securing you as a neighbor our battle was half won, for no one needs a good practical friend more than a city man beginning life in the country."

"Jerusalem! how you talk! I'm goin' right home and tell my wife to call me Saint Jones. Then I'll get a tin halo and wear it, for my straw hat is about played out;" and away he went, chuckling over his odd conceits, but pleased, as all men are, when their goodwill is appreciated. If there is one kind of meanness that disgusts average human-nature more than another it is a selfish, unthankful reception of kindness, a swinish return for pearls.

After an early supper I drove to the village with what I had to sell, and returned with two corn-hooks. At dusk of the following day, Bagley and I had the corn cut and tied up, my helper remarking more than once, "Tell you what it is, Mr. Durham, there hain't a better eared-out patch o' corn in Maizeville."

On the following day I helped Bagley sharpen one of the hooks, and we began to cut the fodder-corn which now stood, green and succulent, averaging two feet in height throughout the field.

CHAPTER XLII

AUTUMN WORK AND SPORT

THE barn was now up, and the carpenters were roofing it in, while two days more of work would complete the sty and poultry-house. Every stroke of the hammer told rapidly now, and we all exulted over our new and better appliances for carrying out our plan of country life. Since the work was being done by contract, I contented myself with seeing that it was done thoroughly. Meanwhile Merton was busy with the cart, drawing rich earth from the banks of the creek. I determined that the making of great piles of compost should form no small part of my fall and winter labor. The proper use of fertilizers during the present season had given such a marked increase to our crops that it became clear that our best prospect of growing rich was in making the land rich.

During the last week of September the nights were so cool as to suggest frost, and I said to Mousie: "I think we had better take up your geraniums and other window plants, and put them in pots or boxes. We can then stand them under a tree which would shelter them from a slight frost. Should there be serious danger it would take us only a few minutes to bring them into the house. You have taken such good care of them all summer that I do not intend that you shall lose them now. Take your flower book and read what kind of soil they grow best in during the winter, and then Merton can help you get it."

The child was all solicitude about her pets, and after dinner she and Merton, the latter trundling a wheelbarrow,

went down to the creek and obtained a lot of fine sand and some leaf-mould from under the trees in the woods. These ingredients we carefully mixed with rich soil from the flower-bed and put the compound in the pots and boxes around the roots of as many plants as there was room for on the table by the sunny kitchen window. Having watered them thoroughly, we stood them under a tree, there to remain until a certain sharpness in the air should warn us to carry them to their winter quarters.

The Lima-beans, as fast as the pods grew dry, or even yellow, were picked and spread in the attic. They could be shelled at our leisure on stormy winter days.

Early in September my wife had begun to give Mousie, Winnie, and Bobsey their lessons again. Since we were at some distance from a schoolhouse we decided to continue this arrangement for the winter with the three younger children. I felt that Merton should go to school as soon as possible, but he pleaded hard for a reprieve until the last of October, saying that he did not wish to begin before Junior. As we still had a great deal to do, and as the boy had set his heart on some fall shooting, I yielded, he promising to study all the harder when he began.

I added, however: "The evenings have grown so long that you can write for half an hour after supper, and then we will review your arithmetic together. It will do me good as well as you."

During the ensuing weeks we carried out this plan partially, but after a busy day in the open air we were apt to nod over our tasks. We were both taught the soundness of the principle that brain-work should precede physical exercise.

The 1st day of October was bright, clear, and mild, and we welcomed the true beginning of fall in our latitude most gladly. This month competes with May in its fitness for ideal country life. The children voted it superior to all other months, feeling that a vista of unalloyed delights was opening before them. Already the butternuts were falling

from several large trees on the place, and the burrs on the chestnuts were plump with their well-shielded treasures. Winnie and Bobsey began to gather these burrs from the lower limbs of an immense tree, eighteen feet in circumference, and to stamp out the half-brown nuts within.

"One or two frosts will ripen them and open the burrs," I said, and then the children began to long for the frost which I dreaded.

While I still kept the younger children busy for a few hours every clear morning in the garden, and especially at clipping the runners from the strawberry plants in the field, they were given ample time to gather their winter hoards of nuts. This pursuit afforded them endless items for talk, Bobsey modestly assuring us that he alone would gather about a million bushels of butternuts, and almost as many chestnuts and walnuts.

"What will the squirrels do then?" I asked.

"They must do as I do," he cried; "pick up and carry off as fast as they can. They'll have a better chance than me, too, for they can work all day long. The little scamps are already taking the nuts off the trees—I've seen 'em, and I wish Merton would shoot 'em all."

"Well, Merton," said I, laughing, "I suppose that squirrels are proper game for you; but I hope that you and Junior won't shoot robins. They are too useful a bird to kill, and I feel grateful for all the music they've given us during the past summer. I know the law permits you to shoot them now, but you and Junior should be more civilized than such a law."

"If we don't get 'em, everybody else will, and we might as well have our share," he replied.

I knew that there was no use in drawing the reins too tight, and so I said: "I have a proposition to make to you and Junior. I'd like you both to promise not to shoot robins except on the wing. That will teach you to be expert and quick-eyed. A true sportsman is not one who tries to kill as much game as possible, but to kill scientifically,

skilfully. There is more pleasure in giving your game a chance, and in bringing it down with a fine long shot, than in slaughtering the poor creatures like chickens in a coop. Anybody can shoot a robin, sitting on a bough a few yards off, but to bring one down when in rapid flight is the work of a sportsman. Never allow yourself to be known as a mere 'pot-hunter.' For my part, I had rather live on pork than on robins or any useful birds."

He readily agreed not to fire at robins except when flying, and to induce Junior to do likewise. I was satisfied that not many of my little favorites would suffer.

"Very well," I said, "I'll coax Mr. Jones to let Junior off to-morrow, and you can have the entire day to get your hands in. This evening you can go down to the village and buy a stock of ammunition."

The boy went to his work happy and contented.

"Papa, where can we dry our butternuts?" Winnie asked.

"I'll fix a place on the roof of the shed right away," I said. "Its slope is very gradual, and if I nail some slats on the lower side you can spread the millions of bushels that you and Bobsey will gather."

Now Bobsey had a little wagon, and, having finished his morning stint of work, he, with Mousie and Winnie, started off to the nearest butternut-tree; and during the remainder of the day, with the exception of the time devoted to lessons, loads came often to the shed, against which I had left a ladder. By night they had at least one of the million bushels spread and drying.

As they brought in their last load about five o'clock in the afternoon I said to them, "Come and see what I've got."

I led the way to the sty, and there were grunting three half-grown pigs. Now that the pen was ready I had waited no longer, and, having learned from Rollins that he was willing to sell some of his stock, had bought three sufficiently large to make good pork by the 1st of December.

The children welcomed the new-comers with shouts; but

I said: "That won't do. You'll frighten them so that they'll try to jump out of the pen. Run now and pick up a load of apples in your wagon and throw them to the pigs. They'll understand and like such a welcoming better;" and so it proved.

At supper I said: "Children, picking up apples, which was such fun this evening, will hereafter be part of your morning work, for a while. In the room over the sty is a bin which must be filled with the fallen apples before any nuts can be gathered."

Even Bobsey laughed at the idea that this was work; but I knew that it would soon become so. Then Mousie exclaimed, "Papa, do you know that the red squirrels are helping us to gather nuts?"

"If so, certainly without meaning it. How?"

"Well, as we were coming near one of the trees we saw a squirrel among the branches, and we hid behind a bush to watch him. We soon found that he was tumbling down the nuts, for he would go to the end of a limb and bite cluster after cluster. The thought that we would get the nuts so tickled Bobsey that he began to laugh aloud, and then the squirrel ran barking away."

"You needn't crow so loud, Bobsey," I said. "The squirrel will fill many a hole in hollow trees before winter, in spite of you."

"I'll settle his business before he steals many more of our nuts," spoke up Merton.

"You know the squirrel wasn't stealing, my boy. The nuts grew for him as truly as for you youngsters. At the same time I suppose he will form part of a pot-pie before long."

"I hate to think that such pretty little creatures should be killed," said Mousie.

"I feel much the same," I admitted; "and yet Merton will say we cannot indulge in too much sentiment. You know that we read that red squirrels are mischievous in the main. They tumble little birds out of their nests, carry off

corn, and I have seen them gnawing apples for the sake of the seeds. It wouldn't do for them to become too plentiful. Moreover, game should have its proper place as food, and as a means of recreation. We raise chickens and kill them. Under wise laws, well enforced, nature would fill the woods, fields, and mountains with partridges, quail, rabbits, and other wholesome food. Remember what an old and thickly settled land England is, yet the country is alive with game. There it is protected on great estates, but here the people must agree to protect it for themselves."

"Junior says," Merton explained, "that the partridges and rabbits in the mountains are killed off by foxes and wild-cats and wood-choppers who catch them in traps and snares."

"I fancy the wood-choppers do the most harm. If I had my way, there would be a big bounty for the destruction of foxes, and a heavy fine for all trappers of game. The country would be tenfold more interesting if it were full of wild, harmless, useful creatures. I hope the time will come when our streams will be again thoroughly stocked with fish, and our wild lands with game. If hawks, foxes, trappers, and other nuisances could be abolished, there would be space on yonder mountains for partridges to flourish by the million. I hope, as the country grows older, that the people will intelligently co-work with nature in preserving and increasing all useful wild life. Every stream, lake, and pond could be crowded with fish, and every grove and forest afford a shelter and feeding-ground for game. There should be a wise guardianship of wild life, such as we maintain over our poultry-yards, and skill exercised in increasing it. Then nature would supplement our labors, and furnish a large amount of delicious food at little cost."

"Well, papa, I fear I shall be gray before your fine ideas are carried out. From what Junior says, I guess that Bagley and his children, and others like them, will get more game this winter than we will, and without firing a shot. They are almost as wild as the game itself, and know just

where to set their snares for it. I can't afford to wait until it's all killed off, or till that good time comes of which you speak, either. I hope to shoot enough for a pot-pie at least to-morrow, and to have very good sport while about it."

"I have good news about the Bagley children," said my wife. "I was down there to-day, and all the children begin school next Monday. Between clothes which our children have outgrown, and what Mrs. Bagley has been able to buy and make, all three of the young Bagleys make a very respectable appearance. I took it upon myself to tell the children that if they went to school regularly we would make them nice Christmas presents."

"And I confirm the bargain heartily," I cried. "Merton, look out for yourself, or the Bagley boy will get ahead of you at school."

He laughed and, with Junior, started for the village, to get their powder and shot.

The next morning after preparing a good lot of cartridges before breakfast, the two boys started, and, having all day before them, took their lunches with the intention of exploring Schunemunk Mountain. The squirrels, birds, and rabbits near home were reserved for odd times when the lads could slip away for a few hours only.

Our new barn, now about completed, gave my wife and me as much pleasure as the nuts and game afforded the children. I went through it, adding here and there some finishing touches and little conveniences, a painter meanwhile giving it a final coat of dark, cheap wash.

Our poultry-house was now ready for use, and I said to Winnie, "To-night we will catch the chickens and put them in it."

The old horse had already been established in the stable, and I resolved that the cow should come in from this time. In the afternoon I began turning over the fodder corn, and saw that a very few more days would cure it. Although I decided not to begin the main husking until after the middle of the month, I gathered enough ears to start the pigs on the

fattening process. Toward night I examined the apples, and determined to adopt old Mr. Jamison's plan of picking the largest and ripest at once, leaving the smaller and greener fruit to mature until the last of the month. The dark cellar was already half filled with potatoes, but the space left for such apples as we should pick was ready. From time to time when returning from the village I had brought up empty barrels; and in some of these, earlier kinds, like fall pippins and greenings, had been packed and shipped to Mr. Bogart. By his advice I had resolved to store the later varieties and those which would keep well, disposing of them gradually to the best advantage. I made up my mind that the morrow should see the beginning of our chief labor in the orchard. I had sold a number of barrels of windfalls, but they brought a price that barely repaid us. My examination of the trees now convinced me that there should be no more delay in taking off the large and fine-looking fruit.

With the setting sun Merton and Junior arrived, scarcely able to drag their weary feet down the lane. Nevertheless their fatigue was caused by efforts entirely after their own hearts, and they declared that they had had a "splendid time." Then they emptied their game-bags. Each of the boys had a partridge, Merton one rabbit, and Junior two. Merton kept up his prestige by showing two gray squirrels to Junior's one. Red squirrels abounded, and a few robins, brought down on the wing as the boys had promised.

I was most interested in the rattles of the deadly snake which Junior had nearly stepped on and then shot.

"Schunemunk is full of rattlers," Junior said.

"Please don't hunt there any more then," I replied.

"No, we'll go into the main Highlands to the east'ard next time."

Merton had also brought down a chicken hawk; and the game, spread out on the kitchen table, suggested much interesting wild life, about which I said we should read during the coming winter, adding: "Well, boys, you have more than earned your salt in your sport to-day, for each

of you has supplied two game dinners. We shall live like aldermen now, I suppose."

"Yes," cried Merton, "whether you call me 'pot-hunter' or not, I mean my gun to pay its way."

"I've no objections to that," was my laughing answer, "as long as you shoot like a sportsman, and not like a butcher. Your guns, boys, will pay best, however, in making you strong, and in giving you some well-deserved fun after your busy summer. I feel that you have both earned the right to a good deal of play this month, and that you will study all the harder for it by and by."

"I hope you'll talk father into that doctrine," said Junior, as he sat down to supper with us.

The boys were drowsy as soon as they had satisfied their keen appetites, and Mousie laughed at them, saying that she had been reading how the boa-constrictor gorged himself and then went to sleep, and that they reminded her of the snake.

"I guess I'll go home after that," said Junior.

"Now you know I was only poking a little fun," said Mousie, ruefully, as she ran into the kitchen and gathered up his game for him, looking into his face so archly and coaxingly that he burst out: "You beat all the game in the country. I'll shoot a blue jay, and give you its wings for your hat, see if I don't;" and with this compliment and promise he left the child happy.

Merton was allowed to sleep late the next morning, and was then set to work in the orchard, I dividing my time between aiding in picking the apples and turning over the fodder corn.

"You can climb like a squirrel, Merton, and I must depend on you chiefly for gathering the apples. Handle them like eggs, so as not to bruise them, and then they will keep better. After we have gone over the trees once and have stacked the fodder corn you shall have a good time with your gun."

For the next few days we worked hard, and nearly

finished the first picking of the apples, also getting into shocks the greater part of the corn. Then came a storm of wind and rain, and the best of the apples on one tree, which we had neglected, were soon lying on the ground, bruised and unfit for winter keeping.

"You see, Merton," I said, "that we must manage to attend to the trees earlier next year. Live and learn."

The wind came out of the north the day after the storm, and Mr. Jones shouted, as he passed down the road, "Hard frost to-night!"

Then indeed we bustled around. Mousie's flowers were carried in, the Lima-bean poles, still hanging full of green pods more or less filled out, were pulled up and stacked together under a tree, some tomato-vines, with their green and partially ripe fruit, were taken up by the roots and hung under the shed, while over some other vines a covering was thrown toward night.

"We may thus keep a supply of this wholesome vegetable some weeks longer," I said.

Everything that we could protect was looked after; but our main task was the gathering of all the grapes except those hanging against the sides of the house. These I believed would be so sheltered as to escape injury. We had been enjoying this delicious fruit for some time, carrying out our plan, however, of reserving the best for the market. The berries on the small clusters were just as sweet and luscious, and the children were content.

Sure enough, on the following morning white hoar-frost covered the grass and leaves.

"No matter," cried Winnie, at the breakfast-table; "the chestnut burrs are opening."

By frequent stirring the rest of the corn-fodder was soon dried again, and was stacked like the rest. Then we took up the beets and carrots, and stored them also in the root cellar.

We had frost now nearly every night, and many trees were gorgeous in their various hues, while others, like the butternuts, were already losing their foliage.

The days were filled with delight for the children. The younger ones were up with the sun to gather the nuts that had fallen during the night, Merton accompanying them with his gun, bringing in squirrels daily, and now and then a robin shot while flying. His chief exploit however was the bagging of half a dozen quails that unwarily chose the lower part of our meadow as a resort. Then he and Junior took several long outings in the Highlands, with fair success; for the boys had become decidedly expert.

"If we only had a dog," said Merton, "we could do wonders."

"Both of you save your money next summer, and buy one," I replied; "I'll give you a chance, Merton."

By the middle of the month the weather became dry and warm, and the mountains were almost hidden in an Indian summer haze.

"Now for the corn-husking," I said, "and the planting of the ground in raspberries, and then we shall be through with our chief labors for the year."

Merton helped me at the husking, but I allowed him to keep his gun near, and he obtained an occasional shot which enlivened his toil. Two great bins over the sty and poultry-house received the yellow ears, the longest and fairest being stored in one, and in the other the "nubbin's," speedily to be transformed into pork. Part of the stalks were tied up and put in the old "corn-stalk barn," as we called it, and the remainder were stacked near. Our cow certainly was provided for.

Brindle now gave too little milk for our purpose, whereas a farmer with plenty of fodder could keep her over the winter to advantage. I traded her off to a neighboring farmer for a new milch cow, and paid twenty dollars to boot. We were all great milk-topers, while the cream nearly supplied us with butter.

Having removed the corn, Mr. Jones plowed the field deeply, and then Merton and I set out the varieties of raspberries which promised best in our locality, making the

hills four feet apart in the row, and the rows five feet from one another. I followed the instructions of my fruit book closely, and cut back the canes of the plants to six inches, and sunk the roots so deep as to leave about four inches of soil above them, putting two or three plants in the hill. Then over and about the hills we put on the surface of the ground two shovelfuls of compost, finally covering the plants beneath a slight mound of earth. This would protect them from the severe frost of winter.

These labors and the final picking of the apples brought us to the last week of the month. Of the smaller fruit, kept clean and sound for the purpose, we reserved enough to make two barrels of cider, of which one should go into vinegar, and the other be kept sweet, for our nut-crackings around the winter fire. Bobsey's dream of "millions of bushels" of nuts had not been realized, yet enough had been dried and stored away to satisfy even his eyes. Not far away an old cider-mill was running steadily, and we soon had the barrels of russet nectar in our cellar. Then came Saturday, and Merton and Junior were given one more day's outing in the mountains with their guns. On the following Monday they trudged off to the nearest public school, feeling that they had been treated liberally, and that brain-work must now begin in earnest. Indeed from this time forth, for months to come, school and lessons took precedence of everything else, and the proper growing of boys and girls was the uppermost thought.

CHAPTER XLIII

THANKSGIVING DAY

NOVEMBER weather was occasionally so blustering and stormy that I turned schoolmaster in part, to relieve my wife. During the month, however, were bright, genial days, and others softened by a smoky haze, which gave me opportunity to gather and store a large crop of turnips, to trench in my celery on a dry knoll, and to bury, with their heads downward, all the cabbages for which I could not find a good market. The children still gave me some assistance, but, lessons over, they were usually permitted to amuse themselves in their own way. Winnie, however, did not lose her interest in the poultry, and Merton regularly aided in the care of the stock and in looking after the evening supply of fire-wood. I also spent a part of my time in the wood lot, but the main labor there was reserved for December. The chief task of the month was the laying down and covering of the tender raspberries; and in this labor Bagley again gave me his aid.

Thanksgiving Day was celebrated with due observance. In the morning we all heard Dr. Lyman preach, and came home with the feeling that we and the country at large were prosperous. Mr. and Mrs. Jones, with Junior, dined with us in great state, and we had our first four-course dinner since arriving in Maizeville, and at the fashionable hour of six in the evening. I had protested against my wife's purpose of staying at home in the morning, saying we would "browse around during the day and get up appetites, while in the afternoon we could all turn cooks and help

her." Merton was excepted, and, after devouring a hasty cold lunch, he and Junior were off with their guns. As for Bobsey, he appeared to browse steadily after church, but seemed in no wise to have exhausted his capacity when at last he attacked his soup, turkey drum-stick, and the climax of a pudding. Our feast was a very informal affair, seasoned with mirth and sauced with hunger. The viands, however, under my wife's skill, would compare with any eaten in the great city, which we never once had regretted leaving. Winifred looked after the transfers from the kitchen at critical moments, while Mousie and Winnie were our waitresses. A royal blaze crackled in the open fireplace, and seemed to share in the sparkle of our rustic wit and unforced mirth, which kept plump Mrs. Jones in a perpetual quiver, like a form of jelly.

Her husband came out strong in his comical résumé of the past year's experience, concluding: "Well, we owe you and Mrs. Durham a vote of thanks for reforming the Bagley tribe. That appears to me an orthodox case of convarsion. First we gave him the terrors of the law. Tell yer what it is, we was a-smokin' in wrath around him that mornin', like Mount Sinai, and you had the sense to bring, in the nick of time, the gospel of givin' a feller a chance. It's the best gospel there is, I reckon."

"Well," I replied, becoming thoughtful for a moment with boyish memories, "my good old mother taught me that it was God's plan to give us a chance, and help us make the most of it."

"I remembered the Bagleys to-day," Mrs. Jones remarked, nodding to my wife. "We felt they ought to be encouraged."

"So did we," my wife replied, *sotto voce.*

We afterward learned that the Bagleys had been provisioned for nearly a month by the good-will of neighbors, who, a short time since, had been ready to take up arms against them.

By eight o'clock everything was cleared away, Mrs. Jones

assisting my wife, and showing that she would be hurt if not permitted to do so. Then we all gathered around the glowing hearth, Junior's rat-a-tat-snap! proving that our final course of nuts and cider would be provided in the usual way.

How homely it all was! how free from any attempt at display of style! yet equally free from any trace of vulgarity or ill-natured gossip. Mousie had added grace to the banquet with her blooming plants and dried grasses; and, although the dishes had been set on the table by my wife's and children's hands, they were daintily ornamented and inviting. All had been within our means and accomplished by ourselves; and the following morning brought no regretful thoughts. Our helpful friends went home, feeling that they had not bestowed their kindness on unthankful people whose scheme of life was to get and take, but not to return.

CHAPTER XLIV

WE CAN MAKE A LIVING IN EDEN

WELL, our first year was drawing to a close. The 1st of December was celebrated by an event no less momentous than the killing of our pigs, to Winnie's and Bobsey's intense excitement. In this affair my wife and I were almost helpless, but Mr. Jones and Bagley were on hand, and proved themselves veterans, while Mrs. Jones stood by my wife until the dressed animals were transformed into souse, head-cheese, sausage, and well-salted pork. The children feasted and exulted through all the processes, especially enjoying some sweet spareribs.

I next gave all my attention, when the weather permitted, to the proper winter covering of all the strawberries, and to the cutting and carting home of old and dying trees from the wood lot.

The increasing cold brought new and welcome pleasures to the children. There was ice on the neighboring ponds, and skates were bought as premature Christmas presents. The same was true of sleds after the first fall of snow. This white covering of the earth enabled Merton and Junior to track some rabbits in the vicinity, which thus far had eluded their search.

By the middle of the month we realized that winter had begun in all its rather stern reality; but we were sheltered and provided for. We had so far imitated the ants that we had abundant stores until the earth should again yield its bounty.

Christmas brought us more than its wonted joy, and a better fulfilment of the hopes and anticipations which we had cherished on the same day of the previous year. We were far from regretting our flight to the country, although it had involved us in hard toil and many anxieties. My wife was greatly pleased by my many hours of rest at the fireside in her companionship, caused by days too cold and wintry for outdoor work; but our deepest and most abiding content was expressed one evening as we sat alone after the children were asleep.

"You have solved the problem, Robert, that was worrying you. There is space here for the children to grow, and the Daggetts and the Ricketts and all their kind are not so near as to make them grow wrong, almost in spite of us. A year ago we felt that we were virtually being driven to the country. I now feel as if we had been led by a kindly and divine hand."

I had given much attention to my account-book of late, and had said, "On New Year's morning I will tell you all the result of our first year's effort."

At breakfast, after our greetings and good wishes for the New Year, all looked expectantly at me as I opened our financial record. Carefully and clearly as possible, so that even Winnie might understand in part, I went over the different items, and the expense and proceeds of the different crops, so far as I was able to separate them. Bobsey's attention soon wandered, for he had an abiding faith that breakfast, dinner, and supper would follow the sun, and that was enough for him. But the other children were pleased with my confidence, and tried to understand me.

"To sum up everything," I said, finally, "we have done, by working all together, what I alone should probably have accomplished in the city—*we have made our living.* I have also taken an inventory or an account of stock on hand and paid for; that is, I have here a list on which are named the horse, wagon, harness, cow, crates and baskets, tools, poultry, and pigs. These things are paid for, and we are

so much ahead. Now, children, which is better, a living in the city, I earning it for you all? or a living in the country toward which even Bobsey can do his share?"

"A living in the country," was the prompt chorus. "There is something here for a fellow to do without being nagged by a policeman," Merton added.

"Well, children, mamma and I agree with you. What's more, there wasn't much chance for me to get ahead in the city, or earn a large salary. Here, by pulling all together, there is almost a certainty of our earning more than a bare living, and of laying up something for a rainy day. The chief item of profit from our farm, however, is not down in my account-book, but we see it in your sturdier forms and in Mousie's red cheeks. More than all, we believe that you are better and healthier at heart than you were a year ago.

"Now for the New Year. Let us make the best and most of it, and ask God to help us."

And so my simple history ends in glad content and hope.

THE END

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